

# **Representations of the women snowboarders in Instagram**

- Finding the female snowboarding culture

Laura Tervo  
Pro gradu -thesis  
Audiovisual Media Culture  
EMACIM  
Autumn 2017

University of Lapland, Faculty of Art and Design

Representations of the female snowboarders in Instagram – Finding the women snowboarding culture

Laura Tervo

EMACIM / Audiovisual Media Culture

Pro gradu thesis

94 pages

Summary:

The main approach of this study is to find out how the professional female snowboarders' images in Instagram are representing the female snowboarding culture and so creating and maintaining the values of women snowboarding. Questions studied in this research are: What kind of photos professional female snowboarders are posting on their Instagram accounts? What kinds of women are in snowboarding culture? What do these photos tell about female snowboarding culture? Is there women snowboarding culture?

I will study and interpret 56 Instagram images under the concept of the critical theory. In this theory, there is used context defining, locating the context for the discursion and finally through the discursion identifying the ideologies and identities presented in the data. Interpretation is seeking encoded meanings from the women snowboarding culture.

The study is concentrating on the images of snowboarders as a valuable source of information. The images are important part of their culture and a way to act inside the culture to communicate, take part in the culture and share information and represent their identities and ideologies. This research is also about questions of the gender presentations in the snowboarding culture.

The study shows that women snowboarders post in their Instagram accounts photos telling about their life as a professional snowboarder. There are at least two types of female representations in women snowboarding culture: the feminine snowboarder and the neutral female snowboarder. They are differentiating from each other by their representations that are changing from the personal openness to the strict professional imago. Both representations have common purposes on using Instagram as a tool to take part in the snowboarding culture by discussing with the images in a larger network of snowboarding culture and maintaining their status in the snowboarding culture. The female snowboarding culture is in the state where it is starting to show more independent sub-culture form from the original main snowboarding culture. The interpretation proves that there is women snowboarding culture existing and it is growing. The women snowboarding culture needs iconic pro-snowboarding women to break the rules and make new ones inside the masculine snowboarding culture.

This study points out that there is more to study in the women representations in snowboarding culture. Moreover this study presents how important the matter of visual is for today people. Understanding, identifying and belonging to something through the visual representations are one way to exist and take part in the networks of communication in communities, nations and globally.

Keywords: snowboarding culture, women snowboarding, critical theory, representation, visual culture

I give a permission the Pro gradu -thesis to be read in the Library



## INDEX

### *Acknowledgements*

<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>1.1 Research questions and the photos of the women snowboarders</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>1.2 Research of snowboarding culture</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>1.3 Briefly about snowboarding</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>1.4 Placing one's own research of snowboarding culture</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>1.5 Women in the culture of snowboarding</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>1.6 Structure of the research</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>1.7 The ethical concerns of the research</i>	<i>20</i>
<b>2 RESEARCHING THE CULTURAL, RESEARCHING THE VISUAL</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>2.1 Researching culture</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>2.2 Researching visual culture and semiotics</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>2.3 Critical Theory giving the tools to read the images and participate into the discourse</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>2.3.1 Context and location of the context</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>2.3.2 Discourse</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>2.3.3 Identity</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>2.4 Practise of looking as part of the reading the visual culture</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>2.4.1 Role of the gaze in practices of looking</i>	<i>41</i>
<b>3 CONTEXT OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA</b>	<b>44</b>
<i>3.1 Internet, the cyberspace and the social media</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>3.2 Instagram</i>	<i>48</i>
<b>4 DEFINING THE CONCEPTS</b>	<b>51</b>
<i>4.1 Female snowboarding culture</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>4.2 Visual culture and reading visual</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>4.3 Image is the object</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>4.4 Interpreting the representations</i>	<i>56</i>
<b>5 TOWARDS THE INTERPRETATION</b>	<b>60</b>
<i>5.1 Material</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>5.2 Snowboarders and their Instagram accounts</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>5.3 Choosing the images and framing the themes of the images</i>	<i>66</i>
<b>6 ANALYSIS</b>	<b>71</b>
<i>6.1 Friends and fun</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>6.2 Sport activities</i>	<i>77</i>

<i>6.3 Snowboarding and snowboarding places</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>6.4 Nature and scenery</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>6.5 Winter</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>6.6 The representations of the women snowboarders</i>	<i>88</i>
<b>7 CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>93</b>
<i>7.1 There is female snowboarding culture existing</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>7.2 Evaluating the process and the results</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>7.3 Further study</i>	<i>97</i>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>98</b>

## *Acknowledgements*

*I want to say thank you.*

*Thank you my man Juho, my supporter and the one always believing in me, in every situation, even when I wanted to give up, and organizing your time to give me some.*

*Thank for the mothers in our life, Pirjo and Annamaija. How anything could be possible without mothers? My sister Ansku. You all have given me time.*

*Thank you all my friends for the support and various interesting discussions about the topic.*

*And not least, thank you my beautiful and wise daughter Aino, for the patience. And for most reason, making the order in my life to finally complete this work.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

I am interested in the power of the images. Images, like photographs, presenting always something and at the same time photographs creating representations of something. It is about individuals, but also about the culture we are living, how we are interpreting these pictures. Today we can't avoid the flood of images. There are images everywhere. Especially now, at the age of Internet and cyberspaces the technical instruments for digital image making is developing faster than ever. People have glued the mobile phones on their hands. They are taking about selfies and with hashtags connecting their digital photos in the galleries of thousands and thousands of photos sharing the same "thought".

It is interesting how these same photos are, personal pictures and published in personal forums with personal goals, used at the same time as a tool to market themselves, values of life, products they use and lifestyle they have chosen. Is social media, as a frame and place of the photographs, creating authentic or genuine impressions?

I have noticed that by following the snowboarders' Instagram accounts, especially the female snowboarders', there are growing needs in me. Needs like: "I want to travel to Lake Tahoe", "I need to start yoga classes" and "I wish I could skateboard also". Images, where life seems to be fun, easy and full of exiting adventures makes me feel less. I'm less an active and aware snowboarder: "I'm not living the life as I want or could", "I'm not doing the things I should" or "I'm not part of the "real community of female snowboarders"". And at the same time the reason why I'm so interested about these role models is that, I feel that we share the same values and mindset. The environment of living is similar and the preferred lifestyle close to the nature with the passion about snow and snowboarding and other "sporty" activities in the nature.

So the assumption is that professional female snowboarding images taken, chosen and posted by them are representing the lifestyle of snowboarding culture, community, and individuals. The images are telling about the ideals and values of the snowboarding individuals and the snowboarding community. What those ideals and values are, how these are told and how these images are effecting on me is what this study is about.

### *1.1 Research questions and the photos of the women snowboarders*

I will interpret the images of women snowboarders as cultural and communal phenomena and examine how women snowboarders' images are connecting in the social and cultural environment we are living. The main approach in this study is to find out how the professional female snowboarders' images in Instagram - as a language of themselves, full of signs and symbols and meanings - are representing the female snowboarding culture and so recreating and maintaining the values of women snowboarding. Questions studied in this research are:

- What kind of photos professional female snowboarders are posting on their Instagram accounts?
- What kinds of women are in snowboarding culture?
- What do these photos tell about female snowboarding culture?
- Is there women snowboarding culture?

There are four women's photos studied in this research. These professional women have won Olympic and X-games medals. Also they have been in the top of the snowboarders for a decade and they are active users of Instagram. I have chosen these snowboarders as I have followed them in the Instagram for year or two now. One of the reasons these women and their photos were chosen, is that they are also known for the big audience from the international competitions and for example from the sport and lifestyle magazines. For this study, I felt, that it's important that the photos of the study have large group of viewers. The amount of the viewers tells about the amount of the influence these pictures can create, even the impact would be different between the viewers.

I will study and interpret these images under the concept of critical theory. Precisely I will use Mika Hannula's (2001) theory of critical theory as a tool for examining the visual culture of women snowboarders. This theory demands the sufficient context defining, locating the context for the discursion and finally through the discursion identifying the ideologies and identities presented in the data. Interpretation is seeking encoded meanings from the women snowboarding culture. My reading of the images fixes the dominant and personal meanings. In this study it is also about finding the iconic, symbolic and indexical signs from the images and interpreting their meanings in the context of women snowboarding culture. The signs of the meanings, the representations are conducted from the context where it is dissected. I will focus on presenting the spectator, me, through the thesis and by sincerity justify my interpretations.

My role, as a researcher, is to analyze what I see, describe what I'm seeing and tell what I understand from these pictures. I'm, as a spectator, giving meanings to the pictures analyzed (decoding the images as said by Stuart Hall (1997)). My background towards the context studied is a user of the Instagram service and hobby based female snowboarder from Finland. This study is about research of visual culture but also a note of an empirical experience of analyzing one's own hobby and the values and personal meaning making behind it.

In my research, the objects of the study are the 56 photos posted by four professional female snowboarders on the social media channel Instagram. These photos have been collected from their accounts during the spring 2016 but the dates of the publishing the photos vary. Photos to be studied come from four professional women snowboarders: Kelly Clark (USA), Jamie Andersson (USA), Hannah Teter (USA) and Enni Rukajärvi (FIN). Together they have over 650 000 followers in Instagram and they have posted about 3 000 photos all on, on their accounts in the past few years. These photos present mostly snowboarding but also the whole lifestyle of the female snowboarders; the places, actions, free time activities, friends and other important things.

By following these women for few years in Instagram, the choice of the images for the research was a somewhat problematic. Problematic because I already had personal relationship to the images and I already had some preconception of the images, for example of what kind of hobbies these women have and what kind of scenery they are presenting. In the Instagram photos, these women are more or less snowboarding, as it is their main profession. Usually, they are in the middle of nature, or the environments seen in the pictures are at least close to the nature. These women are almost always doing something in the pictures. This doing is, beside the snowboarding, close to the other action sports and training their bodies. They are at the center of the photos, usually by themselves, but there are photos where they are having fun with friends also. These photos are telling the story about passionate women, who are skilled and cool-headed competitors, who love to snowboard and are interested about the nature. The world and the shape of it seems to me magnificent, outstanding and untouchable through their photos. They have access on the places where normal people won't get every day. They are competing against others, learning new snowboarding tricks and developing themselves but also enjoying their life full of snowboarding.

This study is not concentrating on the photos where snowboarding as an action is in the center of the photo, even it is one of the most important content for the women snowboarders regarding to their photos. This study is not meant to dissect how good snowboarders these women are and what kind of snowboarding tricks they are presenting or for example of how

snowboarding is presented in the women's snowboarding pictures. Instead I'm focusing on the external factors of the snowboarding culture and so I'm describing the interpretation of the environments, free time actions, other persons and actors and lifestyle of these women.

### *1.2 Research of snowboarding culture*

Snowboarding culture has been on the spot of the research from the 90s. So, there has been research of snowboarding as long as from the decade I started snowboarding. The snowboarding culture and the development of the culture have gone through big steps during my personal attachment into the sport or in better words leisure activity. What was the snowboarding culture in the early 90s is different from the culture it is today.

In the last decades, the research has been focusing mainly on the physical medicine and physical injuries of the snowboarding sport, but some key studies about the snowboarding culture have been also done. Duncan Humphreys wrote 1996 about *Snowboarders: Bodies Out of Control and in Conflict*, concentrating on the differences between snowboarders and skiers (Hänninen 2012, 86-88). This margin has been in one of the main question through out the history of snowboarding. In 1997, Humphreys wrote again, this time about *Shredheads Go Mainstream - Snowboarding and Alternative youth*, criticizing the alternative youth culture turning into mainstream. (Hänninen 2012, 84.) The commercialization of the snowboarding has had the biggest influence in shaping the snowboarding culture and how we see the culture today.

The 90s could be categorized as the research period of the anarchy and cultural resistance in the snowboarding culture studies (Hänninen 2012, 84). In 21<sup>st</sup> century one of the main researchers has been New Zealander Holly Thorpe from the field of sociology of sport and youth culture. The study of the snowboarders has been dominated by New Zealander critical sociology and feminist research frames. Also snowboarding has been linked in the research of leisure time and for example to the physical culture studies. (Hänninen 2012, 84.) Snowboarding culture has been presented quite strongly as a field of youth culture (Hänninen 2012, Ojala 2015).

In the past few years, University of Jyväskylä has published two doctoral theses about snowboarding (Hänninen 2012, Ojala 2015). Riitta Hänninen made her doctoral thesis, *The Allure of Powder Snow – A Study on Snowboarding Culture*, about snowboarding as a lifestyle and as a representation of the style. She described the ways snowboarders presented

their everyday lives and what kind of values and practices was founded from these presentations. Her main method was ethnography completed with interviews and questionnaire. Ethnography has also been the main method almost in all researches about snowboarding culture. Study of Hänninen was focusing mainly on Finnish snowboarders but she has also added in the study her findings from the snowboarders in Scotland. Her study is an important key text to present the snowboarding culture and the study of the snowboarding culture in the historical time frame, listing at the same time the important researchers of the field of snowboard, like Humphreys and Thorpe.

Hänninen approaches snowboarding from the perspective of style, noting that style is an important factor of snowboarders' daily life. Style of snowboarders is presented through the clothes, music, way to ride on snowboard and in the values and attitudes towards society and world. Hänninen quotes Tim Edensor and Sophia Richards (2007) to highlight the thought that snowboarding is a lifestyle that represents the antithesis against ordinary. But as it comes out in the doctoral thesis of Hänninen and as she notes already at the beginning of the thesis: *"Ideologically it is difficult to say what are the matters that snowboarding culture is criticizing and for what kind of matters snowboarding culture is finding an alternative"*. Through the selection of values snowboarders are seeking the ways to structure their daily lives. (Hänninen 2012, 12.)

Anna-Liisa Ojala published her doctoral thesis at 2015. Her work *"Alternative and mainstream: a study on the attitudes, circumstances and resources framing the careers of Finnish freestyle snowboarders"*, studied professional Finnish snowboarders and their profession. In her thesis Ojala finds out that there are two different fields inside the snowboarding as a profession, these are competing and filming. She also introduces the term *"creative entrepreneur athletes"* (straight translation) as a profession of snowboarders who create their own *"producing company"* to present their snowboarding skills through different media concepts like films. Ojala's work is, like Hänninen's too, important knowledge about the snowboarding as a ballpark phenomenon and culture to be studied. Snowboarding as a phenomenon connects the alternative culture to mass-culture and consumption and it is also interesting part of the phenomenon of the subcultures.

Both, Hänninen and Ojala, underline the importance of studying snowboarding culture from the perspective of the snowboarders: how snowboarders themselves see and experience their lives and culture. Hänninen explains that in the history of snowboarding there are examples of unsubstantial criticism confronted by the snowboarders as a try to control and shape the sport (or culture). So, according to Hänninen, it is understandable that the snowboarders look with



great interest and prejudice those who define snowboarding as youth culture, life style or as a sport. (Hänninen 2012, 47.)

### *1.3 Briefly about snowboarding*

Snowboarding was born at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early forms of it were in the sledding and skiing. In the 1960s started “The New Leisure Movement” which representatives looked snowboarding with high passion. The New Leisure Movement is known as a bourgeois or middle-class movement searching for alternatives for traditional sports and alternative for the traditional set of values in sport. Or in other words they were looking for the possibility to have fun and enjoy the informality in the sports. The rise of the extreme-sports is very much linked in The New Leisure Movement. Already in the early snowboarding culture, through The New Leisure Movement, the main values in snowboarding were co-operation, self-expression and to be against the competing. In today’s snowboarding, these values are very much present. Snowboarding today is having fun, being social and it is about self-fulfillment. (Hänninen 2012, 16.)

The first snowboard was called snurfer. Word came from snow added surfing aka snurfing. Jake Burton developed new mass-product from the snurfer in 1970s, known snowboard. This again started the growth of snowboard manufacturers in the field of snowboarding. The boards were developed into different climates and circumstances: i.e. riding outside the slopes in the mountains, jibbing on the build snowboarding parks with the big jumping spots and pipes or to the racetrack. These different environments have effected also on the born of different genres inside the snowboarding (freestyle, freeride, carvers). In 1980s snowboards arrived at the small special stores, which also goaded the competition from the audiences and users between the different manufacturers. This competition between manufacturers and development of the sport assisted snowboarding to achieve approval in the sport industry. End of the 1980s snowboarding was finally allowed in the skiing centers and slopes. Before this, snowboarding was possible in the natural environments only, where the original riding style of the sport is also coming from. Lake Tahoe in United States California is famous of being the birthplace of snowboarding culture as we know it today. (Ojala 2015, 12.)

When Olympic committee interested in snowboard in the end of the 1990s, as a strategy to reach youths, snowboarding changed again. From the alternative, snowboard became mainstream as millions of people followed the snowboarders competing in Nagano 1998. Before the Olympics, the competitions in snowboarding were only for the purpose of to get

together and have fun with friends, present skills and party. After the Olympic took the snowboarding part of the sport games, also International Ski Federation (FIS) interested about the sport. (Ojala 2015, 12-14.) In 2010 Vancouver Olympics Shaun White was the most popular athlete and his ride in the pipe finals followed by 30 million viewers only in the USA (Ojala 2015, 19).

Amount of the competitions started to grow in the beginning of the 2000 and because of the great affect of the competitions towards the sport snowboarders started to be conscious about what competitions where part of the “real” snowboarding culture, i.e. X-Games and TTR. In season 2012-2013 the most important competitions were finally collected under the same World Snowboard Tour. (Ojala 2015, 12-14.) But during the Olympic years, snowboarders who are competing are collecting the points from the FIS snowboarding competitions. The difference between the FIS and World Snowboard Tour is fundamental, mainly it is in the original thought of traditional sport against sport as a lifestyle, the alternative history of the snowboarding culture and so on the appreciation towards the organizer of the competitions.

Snowboarders have their own unique style to move and the style also combines influences from the surfing and skateboarding. These “street-cultures” are also familiar from the events where the community gathers to present their skills, find new influences and act unsportsmanlike. This almost institutional behavior inside the snowboarding culture; using drugs, partying and challenging recklessly individuals physically, is construed to be young men’s playground for their bodies and ideologies. Role and the status of the women snowboarders in this kind of cultural behavior have been debatable. (Ojala 2015, 12-13.)

One of the main questions inside the snowboarding is: is snowboarding alternative subculture or commercialized sport. Hänninen quotes Stamm & Lamprecht (1997), who states that snowboarding is not commercialized product because it’s origin in the world outside the commercialization. For them, snowboarding is more realistic trend sport (Hänninen 2012, 20). Pro-snowboarders have accepted the commercialization of the culture as a way to perform the life of a snowboarder: to be able to ride on snow day after day and get paid of it. They have their own teams and their products are sold with their imago. In the other hand, the deals with the sponsors, means giving up from some of the freedom to choose. (Ojala 2012, 25-26.) One example of the conflict between the pro-snowboarder and the sponsor was when Enni Rukäjärvi ended her longtime contract to Redbull, as according to her, the company didn’t fit in the values of Rukajärvi.

Snowboarding is more than a sport for the snowboarders, for them snowboarding is a lifestyle. Reputation of snowboarding is based on the style adopted from the skateboarding. This street-style is seen in the clothing, in the aggressive behavior and in the impressive risk-taking. (Hänninen 2012, 17.) Pro-snowboarders are living from the competitions or filming. In the snowboarding competitions snowboarders are evaluated by the judges from the trick made in the tracks and by the style. Filming again is usually happening outside the slopes i.e. urban places like street walls or natural environments like mountains. Snowboarders have differences on their opinions i.e. when it comes to the importance of the competitions. This richness and disharmony is speaking for the statement, that snowboarding is not only one coherent sport but it is alternative and mainstream culture at the same time. (Ojala 2013, 20-35.)

In snowboarding, the friends are the main function of the culture. The snowboarding crew is collecting the same spirit people together and representing together the communal spirit of it. In the snowboarding culture there is hierarchy. The elite of the snowboarders, usually they are pro-ones, are deciding about the style and which way to develop the style. But still, it is dependent of the snowboarder's status inside the culture and what is felt important by them, i.e. longing for freedom or feeling of community. The top one snowboarders are the icons who are deciding the style of the visual elements presented in the culture of snowboarding. And it is the majority, the no ones, who decide to follow them or not. The snowboarders have chosen the sport because it is cosy, speedy and dynamic, exiting, it gives chance to spend time with people likeminded who are appreciating that ride is nice, speedy and exiting. The main thing for the snowboarder is the experience of freedom and friends, whom to share your values and lifestyle. (Hänninen 2012, 104, 110-113.) Freedom in the other hand can be learning new things and becoming better as a human. Freedom is also self-expression with style. Freedom for the snowboarder is also excitement and taking risk, speed and danger and competing as part of having fun with friends. More over freedom is the possibility to experience snow and the real nature. (Hänninen 2012, 106-107.)

#### *1.4 Placing one's own research of snowboarding culture*

The previous studies about snowboarding culture are dealing with the questions like; is snowboarding as a marginal-culture developing into mass-culture and juxtaposition of the snowboarding. Hänninen notes that during the development of the snowboarding culture, marginal and anarchism has changed. Maybe in the paradoxical way, snowboarding has

changed to the commercial product that presents the values of one's own culture. Hänninen points out also the role of the juxtaposition, not as differentiating inside the culture, but differentiating outsiders of the culture. (Hänninen 2012, 18-19.)

This study of the representations of the female snowboarders in the social media channel Instagram is approaching the research of snowboarding culture quite different viewpoint in the contrast to the earlier studies. Firstly the study is concentrating on the images of the snowboarders as a valuable source of information. The visual data in the research is the key element to study snowboarding culture. The images are snowboarders' self-produced content so the snowboarders have made the choose of what is presented and how it is presented and what they leave outside the image. I, as a researcher and interpreter, understand that these images are important part of their culture and a way to act inside the culture, for example to communicate, take part to the culture and share information and not least represent their identities and ideologies.

The both studies, Hänninen and Ojala, pointed out that images like photographs and videos have important role in the snowboarding culture. Ojala talks about special media. With this special media she means the publications that are produced by the culture itself. Snowboarders, like skateboarders and surfers, have they own magazines and TV-programs. This special media maintains the standard of the snowboarding and the media also enables the wide presentation of the lifestyle of the snowboarders. For example, in the snowboarding movies, snowboarder can select the music of one's own taste, choose the tricks to show to the audience and present the style of the clothes wanted. This is the way, how the snowboarders pass the music taste to the audience and present the hottest tricks, places and styles to the viewers. This special media is also the link to the consumption markets. Selling the ideology to the viewer, the snowboarder is able to get some profits and manage economically in the field of snowboarding. (Ojala 2015, 22-25.)

Hänninen again notes that the snowboarders counterpoint the authenticity of content produced by the snowboarders. Taking a part into the production of snowboarding film, for example, is important process to build one's own identity as a snowboarder. But Hänninen also notes that there is the conflict between the media and the one controlling the commercialization through media. Is the control of the representations their own (snowboarders') or the equipment manufacturers'? (Hänninen 2012, 98.)

Furthermore, the importance of the image making by visual is presented, without a doubt, in the earlier studies. So, it is natural that the images are the key to enter into the discursion of

snowboarding culture. There is no question of what is snowboarding culture. However, the questions about the gender roles in the snowboarding culture are contradictory still. With this study of female snowboarder representations I'm willing to state that there is female snowboarding culture existing and it has its own values and meanings.

### *1.5 Women in the culture of snowboarding*

Women have been part of the snowboarding culture from the beginning of the sport but they have always been quantitative and social minority in, usually known quite masculine, snowboarding culture. Female snowboarders and their standing in the snowboarding culture have been under the research and discussion from the 90s. Quite many researchers note that the snowboarding culture is very masculine and attitude towards female snowboarders is often sexist and dismissive. (Hänninen 2012, 90.)

Holly Thorpe has written an article in 2007, *Jibbing the Gender Orders: Female snowboarders in the Snowboarding Culture*, opening the positions of female snowboarders in snowboarding culture. This article approaches the gender issue from the perspective of liberal feminism and radical feminism. First one stating that the women have changed snowboarding culture to the gender-neutral sport and the later one arguing that "*creation of commodified and glamorous heroines of snowboarding legitimizes hierarchies and inequality*" (Thorpe 2007, 84).

In Thorpe's article she is stating that inside the snowboarding culture there are two viewpoints to understand the women's position and possibilities to interact inside the culture. The positive side, the liberal feminism, is to see the female snowboarder as a "gender free" actor riding aggressive and fearless, and with technical maneuvers, creativity and knowing how to jib. This way they have earned the credibility inside the culture. Other side, the radical feminism, is accenting to face the fact, that snowboarding is dominant male sport and this comes out in the slopes, magazines and in the management of snowboarding companies. (Thorpe 2007, 77-81.) Thorpe has referenced former female pro-snowboarder Roberta Rodger when stating that snowboarding culture is "reinforcing female 'otherness' and male superiority" (Thorpe 2007, 83).

To continue, Riitta Hänninen notes in her study that she is not focusing in the female image of snowboarding culture. But also continues that the women's position in snowboarding culture is conflicting. (Hänninen 2012, 95.) Ojala's research is referring on Thorpe and others when describing the masculinity of the sport (2015, 14). For example about the masculinity of the

sport; in the pages of the snowboarding magazines snowboarders are building the imago of masculinity that requires making a difference from the femininity and wrong styles of masculinity, according to sociology Elina Mikkola whom Hänninen is referring (2012, 90). Both, Thorpe has, and Hänninen supports her, noted that women snowboarders are often presented by the looks and emphasizing the sexuality of the women. This again is not improving the position of the women in snowboarding culture. (Hänninen 2012, 99.)

Sport sociologist Jennifer Hargreaves, according to Thorpe, states that female snowboarders are trained and marketed to be entertainers and spectacle. According to Hargreaves women snowboarders are *“products of the system that continually induces them to risk their bodies and produces them as sexual commodities for global audiences”* (Thorpe 2007, 84). On the other hand Thorpe has discovered that the snowboarding industry and media characteristically encourages the imago of women snowboarders as role models inspiring others to be independent, self-confident and to adopt aggressive riding styles (2007, 84).

Thorpe notes that snowboarding embodies an increasingly competitive nature and so on it encourages individualism and structural subordination of women. To get access in the male dominant institution of competitive snowboarding, women are forced to adopt the hierarchies and aggressive values and competitive relationships. This again, the social ideology in the snowboarding, is manifesting the aggressive need to get to the top, or to be seen as better than others. This ideology embraces hierarchy and it is destroying the community that once existed among the women boarders. Thorpe states that the femininities in the snowboarding culture are diverse to those who challenge the maleness of snowboarding and those who are passively accepting it and even supporting male hegemony. (Thorpe 2007, 83.) Thorpe states that the women who endorse ‘no pain, no gain’ philosophies and ride aggressive unwittingly support the masculinization of snowboarding. The individual women, who success under these philosophies, are also entitled with a lucrative lifestyle, money and status. (Thorpe 2007, 92.)

The change of women presence in the snowboarding culture started in the 90s during the commercialization of the sport. The snowboard manufacturers noted the growing amount of women snowboarders and so on they saw the growth of the consumers with the needs of women and they started to develop snowboards and gears for women too. From the 90s professional female snowboarders have been the icons and role-models for the younger generations. They are now the leaders of the women snowboarding businesses; i.e. marketing, sponsoring and working as an agent for women snowboarders. (Hänninen 2012, 91.)

As Hänninen notes, according to Holly Thorpe female snowboarders are constructing their own habits to be a female snowboarder. Thorpe also states that the female snowboarding is diverging to the own world. This diversion can be also strengthening the masculinity of the main snowboarding culture as it marginalizes the women in their own world. (Hänninen 2012, 94, 98.) As Hänninen states, women are welcome to the sport and there are alternatives for women (competitions, gears, camps, media) but there is always present the valuation inside the culture. This valuation praises the women who ride like guys, with masculine style inside and outside the slopes. These manly women are usually seen as a brilliant snowboarders. And as Thorpe claims, according to Hänninen, that women snowboarders have won the credibility by riding aggressive. Hänninen continues claiming that the women's intention to snowboard same style as men and be as good as men refers on that there is no women snowboarding culture. (Hänninen 2012, 95.)

But as it comes out from the Thorpe's article, there is a growing need for women to develop alternative models to be part of the snowboarding culture. Models like i.e. events encouraging women participation *"on the basis of feminist sporting principles such as recreation, fun and friendship; that allow women to define and shape their own boarding experiences"* (Thorpe 2007, 94). Women snowboarding, and women part of the snowboarding culture needs more and more female-only productions to grow independent girly sport culture. Even the radical feminist believes that there is no chance for the equal opportunities in the present society as the system itself is fundamentally patriarchal (Thorpe 2007, 94). Thorpe ends her article on the prediction that there is new genre order coming in the snowboarding culture and *"females are onboard and making fresh track towards achieving this goal"* (2007, 95).

The definition of woman snowboarder is tricky from the feminine viewpoint (as the definition of a snowboarder is too). In Hänninen's research snowboarders are speaking about the wannabe-snowboarders who usually are women. They used terms like "snowchicks" (snoukkapimu), "daddy is paying gears" (pappa betalar - varusteet) and "wet-ass" (märkäperse). (Hänninen 2012, 94.) Thorpe has also found this description of women snowboarders who are fashion-conscious pretenders worshipping the professional men snowboarders and who are not interested about the snowboarding because of the sport. (Hänninen 2012, 93.) The question of real snowboarder, or real women snowboarder, is fundamental when viewing the snowboarding culture. Who are inside and who are left outside and who has the power to decide it?

Moreover, in the light of presented above, it is important to make a research of the representations of the female snowboarders and define the main elements representing the

women's own snowboarding culture. However, this study is not feminist approach, but it can't avoid the gender and the sex questions, or the question of others. In this study the feminist approaches are present through the research but I won't place my research only in the discursion of the equality or rights of women or different sexualities.

In Hänninen's research she defines snowboarders as persons who can snowboard and who define themselves as snowboarders. The snowboarders taken part in the study of Hänninen are sharing the common thought that the snowboarding is more than a hobby to them and that snowboarders are different when they are inside the snowboarding culture than those who are not inside the culture. (2012, 39.) The ones outside are explained quite well in the concept of "wannabe snowboarder". According to the snowboarders, in Hänninen's research, these wannabe snowboarders are people who snowboard but they are not doing it from the right reasons or they are not passionate about the snowboard as a lifestyle. Same as earlier presented "fashion-conscious pretenders". To these wannabes, snowboarding is just a winter sport hobby or even worse the wannabe snowboarders only use snowboarding to create an imago of a street-credible and stylish individual but who has no knowledge and awareness about the ideology of snowboarding. It is notable, according to Hänninen, that concept of wannabe, is ideologically loaded abstract construction which is the way to differentiate from the living representation in the snowboarding culture without any real life subject. (Hänninen 2012, 41.)

I have thought about this role of an outsider in my relation towards the snowboarding. I don't feel myself a snowboarder even I am. For me it feels that it requires more commitment, skills and own snowboarding "crew" to call myself a snowboarder. This fits for the definition of snowboarder as presented above. But, as I'm interested about snowboarding culture, lifestyle and values and I follow professional snowboarders through the social media I could say I'm taking part in the snowboarding culture in some level. This level is more than a winter hobby but it is also less than a lifestyle. With my phone and social media, I am able to connect to these images, idols and culture when ever and where ever I want. And at the same time I can't avoid them affecting me. In this sense, I'm part of this global village talked by Marshall McLuna 1964 (Hänninen 2012, 43). This global village is a cultural state born from the modern mass-media. This means that the world is at the same time small as we can connect and share information through technology but also it is larger than ever as we can connect to more and more matters in the world. (Hänninen 2012, 43.) And through the social media the concept of power, to include and exclude, is faltering, as we are present only virtually.



Internet, the global, every time open and accessible world of cultures, is not only a tool to study cultures but it is also important part of the culture and the meaning making process in the cultures. This means that Internet is not only an access to the culture but it is part of the phenomenon and object of the research. Hänninen (2012, 13) refers on Andy Bennet when stating that Internet has changed the way youth cultures express through symbols and take part in the sociocultural structures. Ojala (2015, 20) again leans on Thorpe, when noting that snowboarders use social media to communicate about their actions in snowboarding. Beside these, Duncan Humphrey, according to Hänninen (2012, 25-26), has presented in 1996 that in snowboarding, same as in skateboarding, the competing is not as important as presenting and maintaining the right imago. The social media is perfect tool for this kind of imago maintaining. Ojala (2015, 80) agree with Brian Wilson that web media is perfect partner for subcultures. The co-operation with commercial sponsors gives resources to build a meaning making quite freely, as the sponsors are dependable about these imagos. Ojala continues that maybe youth cultures have developed, for this reason, especially proficient in passing the meanings in new liberal capitalism. (Ojala 2015, 80.)

To summarize, in this study I will concentrate to the representations of the female snowboarders in the social media. Internet and the social media is a tool to participate in the culture but it is at the same time part of the culture and it's acts. This study is a trip to examine the otherness what comes of the being part of culture and being excluded from it. But even more, this study is about the women snowboarders.

### *1.6 Structure of the research*

In the following chapters I will open the world of visual culture study and the main theories of viewing the images and interpreting the visual data. In the chapter two I will draw the picture of the cultural and visual research history and the main thoughts of the culture and the visual presenting the theories of culture and the theorists behind the thoughts. The chapter two contains, beside the presentation of the cultural and visual culture studies, the theory of critical theory by Mika Hannula, which is the key theory in my research of visual culture. I will open the thought of interpreting the visual culture by defining the context and locating it in the right discursion and finally finding the identities and ideologies from it. Part of the chapter two is also the important intention of the practice of looking and the concept of the gaze. This part of the chapter two is important to understand the meaning making process and

how we see and understand what we are seeing. The concept of the gaze also explains the position of the feminism in the practice of looking and the importance of the gaze.

The chapter three is owned for reviewing the Internet and social media. I will not try to explain all the dimensions of Internet and social media but generally lift up the main approaches of the Internet and social media studies and concentrate on the approach of social media as a place for visual presentations and as a place to communicate through images. The reason I will not focus on the social media as a phenomenon more deeply is that I feel the social media's function is in the place for the representations and viewing the images. The focus of this study is to interpret the images with the understanding of the place where they are presented but not to examine the possibilities of the social media and Internet in larger scale, i.e. the behavior of the people in the social media or the alter egos of social media.

In the chapter four I will define the main concepts of the study, which is a part of the whole critical theory, to define the context of the study and locating the study in the right discourse. The concepts defined are women snowboarding culture, visual and visual culture, image, interpretation, body, sex and embodiment. With the definitions I will close the concepts of this discourse in this certain research. Following the definitions I will understand the women snowboarding culture as it comes out through the study.

Research problem and the material of the analysis are opened in the chapter five. I will discuss more precisely about the research questions and what I want to achieve by asking them the research questions. Also the material of the analysis, the images and the women behind the images, are presented in the chapter two. In the presentation of the material I also describe the process of choosing the data and forming the themes. The chapter six again is devoted for the analysis of the images and interpreting the visual culture. In the chapter seven I will draw the interpretation together and present my findings with the conclusions. Also I will suggest some further study proposals.

### *1.7 The ethical concerns of the research*

This research deals with few ethical concerns that have to be taken account. Beside the good academic skills and the research integrity, in this research the personal relation of the images to the publicly known women is one point to discuss. This research is done by following the responsible conduct of the research guidelines. I'm giving the credits of the authors of the

thoughts to be presented in this study. I have worked to say my own thoughts with the integrity as possible.

I haven't asked the permission for using the images in the study from the Instagram or the authors of the photos. The reason for not asking for the permission is that the photos are downloaded in the public and open gallery in the web. They are open for viewing for everyone using the Internet. The photos are not behind the "closed" profile but the photos are open for anyone. I believe that everyone, downloading their photos in the web, are accepting the contingency of photos to be used in different context outside the places where the photos are presented, i.e. Instagram.

What comes to the authenticity of photos and the copyright in Instagram, the Instagram's terms of use are noted following: "*You are solely responsible for your conduct and any data, text, information, screen names, graphics, photos, profiles, audio and video clips, links ("Content") that you submit, post, and display on the Instagram service.*" (Instagram 22.4.2017, Terms of use). Instagram also notes that: "Instagram does NOT claim ANY ownership rights in the text, files, images, photos, video, sounds, musical works, works of authorship, applications, or any other materials (collectively, "Content") that you post on or through the Instagram Services. By displaying or publishing ("posting") any Content on or through the Instagram Services, you hereby grant to Instagram a non-exclusive, fully paid and royalty-free, worldwide, limited license to use, modify, delete from, add to, publicly perform, publicly display, reproduce and translate such Content, including without limitation distributing part or all of the Site in any media formats through any media channels, *except Content not shared publicly ("private") will not be distributed outside the Instagram Services.*" (Instagram 22.4.2017, Terms of use).

In the context of the research I believe that the use of these photos is acceptable regarding to the quotation law. The photos are not misused, transformed or used for any financial profit. The authors of the photos are presented in the research and the context of the photos is presented open in the research. The Association of the Internet researchers has published ethical guidelines to those using Internet for the research. The general assumption is that more public the place of the content is to know, the less responsible the researcher is to protect the privacy of the content and ask for permission. Excluding the vulnerable subjects i.e. under – age. Though the researchers are demanded to act sensitive towards the subjects of the study. (Laukkanen 2007, 28.)

The photos are saved for the study by “print screen” key. The print screen pictures present the pictures in the natural way, as they were in the moment when they were viewed through the computer’s screen. I have cropped the basic functions of the web browser outside the images. In the study I will present the pictures in the collection of the images during the material presentation in the chapter five.

The speed of the changes and development of technologies, societies and everyday human behavior is so fast today that nothing is anymore constant. Inconstancy of the space of the data is one key concern what comes to the ethical issues of this study. It is sure that evaluating the research there has to concern that the medium of the study is advancing faster than the researcher. (Emmanuel et al. 2012, 220-222.)

What is public and what is private in the social media is not acute neither. Anonymous behind the social media profiles is possible and what is real and what is fake is not easy to prove. On the other hand one of these advantages is the anonymity on the Internet and that people are more allowed to express their real identities maybe embarrassing ones too. When studying data presented in the digital network, there always has to be the forethought that “*what we are seeing,... is a repeat of some ‘real world’ ...*” (Emmanuel et al. 2012, 222). (Emmanuel et al. 2012, 220-222.)

In this chapter I have opened the world of the snowboarding culture and my own interest towards subject of the study. In the following chapter I will focus on finding out what is cultural and visual culture researching field and opening the theory to approach my interest in the women snowboarding culture.

## 2 RESEARCHING THE CULTURAL, RESEARCHING THE VISUAL

In the following chapter I will open the world of cultural and visual research in the different approaches and sciences with highlighting the key events in the research of culture and the visual. I will draw the thought of culture and especially visual culture as an important language to be studied leaning on i.e. semiotics.

I will communicate with the main thoughts of critical theory. I will not try to define the whole field of critical theory but staying in one special structure presented by Mika Hannula. Or in other words, the critical theory gives the disciplinary in this research of visual culture. In this chapter I will draw the lines for the analyzing process.

In Hannula's discipline I will open the terms of context, location, discourse and identity. In the side of the main focus I will open the thought of looking meanings in the images and seeing genre, particular the female genre, in the research of culture and visual. This research focuses on studying existing visual material.

I understand that this chapter is very wide description of cultural studies and for some readers there might rise the questions of too much unessential points or the question of the history of the visual studies connection towards the subject. But for my defense, I must say, that I needed to study this chapter of cultural and visual studies history to understand where I place my own research and reasoning my observations and analysis as the valid results.

### *2.1 Researching culture*

The research of visual and images seems to root in the field of cultural studies. Cultural studies in the other hand are developed from the diversity of schools; like anthropology, sociology, psychology, film studies and literary criticism. (Emmison et al. 2012, 73.) End of the 19<sup>th</sup> century E.B. Tylor presented the theory of evolution of culture in the field of anthropology. Tylor categorized culture in three forms: savagery following barbarism and finally civilization noting that some of the cultures are better than others. (Kendall & Wickham 2001, 8.) In 1930s Bronislaw Malinowski took part in the discussion about culture that was merely seen through the colonialist eyeglasses so far. Malinowski understood that the

individuals have thinking modes which are collective representations imposing upon their society. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 10-11.)

So the culture studies started by studying the other, the exotic cultures and in around 1950s Birmingham School or the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was founded. Culture was a shifting and complex problem to be solved and cultural studies ensured that culture was never a simple, given object of inquiry what comes to Kendall's and Wickham's opinion. Basement of the cultural studies were in the definition of culture "*...as a series of structures, imperceptible by actors yet providing the limits and possibilities for individual action and social change.*" (Kendall and Wickham 2011, 11.) In this sentence it is presented well, the disharmony of culture and social order in the context of cultural studies (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 5-11).

The founders of British Cultural Studies: Hoggart, Williams, Thompson and Hall, focused first on the attempt to identify high and low culture. Raymond Williams presented the three types of culture: the dominant, the residual and the emergent one, all of them struggled for supremacy. These three types also created new types of culture. Later the CCCS focused more on the emergent form of culture or in other words "(sub) cultural expressions" and analyzing the power (without disciplinary, regarding Kendall and Wickham). The British School of Cultural Studies is the most referenced in the field of cultural studies. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 5-13.)

Most influential cultural theorist must be Stuart Hall. His work in the field of cultural studies summarizes all the elements what the field bottles up. Kendall and Wickham give the appreciation to Hall even when they criticize the cultural studies obsession of finding the meanings and communicating with the meanings and linking the meaning and communicating to power. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 15.) Kendall and Wickham say about Hall: "*His work is basically Marxist, yet this careful engagements with and borrowings from scholars such as Barthes, Althusser, Foucault, the sociological subcultural and deviance tradition (Goffman, Becker) as well as linguistic and media theory, have furnished both him and cultural studies more generally with rich resources for analysis and political action.*" (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 15).

Cultural studies vary in different continents. In American cultural studies, there seems to be more interest in popular culture emphasis the demonstration of the play of signification, which is the complexity of meaning. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 20.) Australian and

Canadian cultural studies have focused more or less in cultural politics and national identity. Asian culture studies deal more with question of otherness, identity and power. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 22.)

The cultural studies involve the study of a 'group's way of life', especially focusing on the meanings including group's morals and beliefs. Kendall and Wickham suggest that cultural studies should control the meanings and dissemination (with circuits of power and with forms of resistance). For Kendall and Wickham, this present that the meanings are problematic elements if the boundaries are not clear. This in the other words means that, according to them, there is no straight answer to the question of what meanings are counted and what are left outside from the research of visual i.e.. This again weakens cultural studies because the research questions become virtually boundless and leads the researchers' flighty criticism of society. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 14.) But as the Emmison et al. proposes that in the visual research all that is required from the researchers is that the signals are interpreted in theoretically and methodologically disciplined ways. (Emmison et al. 2012, 183.) I will lean this study of visual culture, in the statements presented above. It is reasonable to question the discipline and same time the whole validity of the visual and cultural researches. But as it is noted, there are theoretical and methodological disciplines allowing valid cultural studies.

Following the British Cultural Studies inspired by *Gramsci's theory of Hegemony* it was easy to understand more the dominant classes culture or in the other words mass-culture as universal and true. This thinking followed the impression of Frankfurt School, and the British Cultural Studies began to see mass-culture as part of the political process. In this discussion of power took part also Michael Foucault in his publications *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The History of Sexuality vol. 1* (1978). (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 16-18.) Foucault pointed out that there is a need to analyze two aspects in the field of power: a) "*that power operates in local and micro settings*", b) "*that power is depend on knowledge for its successful operation*" (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 17). This kind of thinking of power inspired also the cultural studies of the 1980s and 1990s and the researchers started to see power also in the ordinary places like supermarkets, gym, car park, not only in the obvious places. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 16-18.) In the end of this research the reader can find the power elements of culture also in this study.

The questions of power and the places of power leaded on the disciplinary of time and space in cultural studies. According to Kendall and Wickham, French culture scholar Michel de Certeau argued: "*people engage through their everyday practices, with the world of*

*consumption and in so doing fashion individual and creative.*” (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 18). In the discussion of power and so in the discussion of cultural studies, this means that the mass-culture builds spaces and architectures to order the subcultures. In this thought Kendall and Wickham places their theory of cultural studies as a study of order but they also agree with Tony Bennet that “these orders do not touch the ‘others’, the ones outside the space and culture inside the space. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 18-19.) This study of female snowboarders is proving these claims of orders and so on the rules of cultures to be still existing, even when the cultures would be new, young and marginal.

Cultural studies have always had a ‘virtual’ existence in anthropology and the other human sciences that includes the Critical Theory approach of the Frankfurt School. Cultural studies have varied through a series of migrations and spreading geographically changing, growing and cross-fertilizing the discipline. The cultural studies engagement with colonial and postcolonial theory and postmodernism has effect on cultural studies to become more conscious about ‘otherness’. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 23-24.) The concept of ‘otherness’ can be found from the earlier studies of snowboarding, as presented in the earlier chapter, but it is also present in this study of snowboarding culture.

‘Otherness’ or ‘others’ have been studied in cultural studies all around the world. In Asian cultural studies the studies of others have long traditions. Questions of otherness and others are for example about human races, racism and the identity of others outside the “main culture”. Feminist cultural studies and for example queer studies have pointed out that otherness is everywhere coming out discipline. (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 23.)

Summing up in the cultural studies researchers research the society and cultures. It is about finding out and learning from the others but it is also researching how cultures make means and how the means are shared inside and outside the cultures. Cultural studies study individuals inside the cultures and their representations. The study is also about power and order and so it is study about space, place and time. Cultural studies are not just about mass-culture vs. sub-culture. It is study about the relations of these forms of culture and how these are seen, treated and experienced in certain time and space. And how these are changing through the change of humans.



## 2.2 Researching visual culture and semiotics

*“The world of human beings is a de facto world of signs, the thoughts they elicit, and their overall organization into a system of communal meaning that we call a culture”* (Danesi 1998, 7-8).

The images are one way to view culture or part of the cultures. The images are saved frames from the certain time, about certain people and presenting certain things. But at the same time the images are so much more. The images are part of the wide field of visual culture and the object of visual culture studies varies from works of fine art to popular, sub- and independent image cultures. (Mirzoeff 2012, 310.) And behind the images there is always someone who has made the image and in front of the image there is one who is looking it. So the image is connecting at least two but possibly three subjects. Two when there are no other living beings involved in making the image except the maker and the image reader. Three when there is a living person in the image or someone other i.e. created the arrangements in the image. Already we have the possibility of three different cultures mixing in one image. What interpreting the image can tell about the image itself or about the image viewers i.e.?

When studying images presented in the certain location, there are various viewpoints where to approach the research. Visual research was institutionalized in the late 1980s and during the height of critical theory at 1990s (Mirzoeff 2012, 311). Researching the visual, places under the semiotics heavily as it is, finding meanings on signs and signals by looking a visual data. Analyzing the visual is interpreting. Interpreting by leaning on the hermeneutic tradition and qualitative research methodology. But at the same time taking the advice from Kendall and Wickham (2001) not to focusing on the question of ‘What is this object really meaning’ too much as it is (like Kendall and Wickham point outs) *“...dangerously, going off to ballast some grand theory or other”* (2001, 162). Moreover leaning on the point of Emmison et al. present, that the visual research should focus more in what is seen than the frame of the image (2012, 106).

If visual culture studies lean on semiotics, what is semiotics? Semiotics is included in the studies of communication, media and culture studies and as a complementary or supplementary also in i.e. psychology, mythology, education, literary studies and cultural anthropology. Semiotics is *“providing an interpretive screen for filtering the symbols and images that assail us on a daily basis – images that are surreptitiously, but gradually, shaping the thoughts, personalities, and lifestyle behaviors of countless individuals, as well as*

*covertly suggesting how we can, as a species, best satisfy our innermost urges and aspirations... The semiotic "filtration process" allows one to uncover the implicit messages in those images" (Danesi 1998, 7-8).*

Semiotics is then a tool or disciplinary to interpret visual codes. To interpret the images we need to understand codes; signs hidden in those. A sign is readable and it is something presenting something. Inside the sign there is various signifiers, such as color tones, physical appearance, background scenery for example. These are analyzable with semiotic notions like codes, oppositions, combinations and symbolicity. The relationship is the connection between signifier and signified or in other words representation and object. (Beasley and Danesi 2002, 38-39.)

Visual research and semiotics can be tool to study social world or human behavior. And so on semiotics is a tool to learn about culture. Study of the representations of the female snowboarders is a study precisely about the female snowboarding culture. The visual data can be for example any image (usually it is), video, painting, sculpture, existing place (park, shopping center, living room) or anything worth to look and analyze, and representing the female snowboarding.

The background of the visual research is coming from both social sciences and cultural studies. The visual research has never been presented under the one key theory and everything under the visual research is hard to summarize. One way to understand visual research is to look two different approaches using the visual data in the last century. Social sciences, and to be exact ethnography and social anthropology research traditions, have supported the use of camera collecting and saving data in the researches. The other dimension of visual research in 20s century has been more close to the semiotics and school of cultural studies. The school of cultural studies has supported the importance of studying also commercial produced images. In the last decades the research of visual has changed outstandingly due to development of technologies and development of modern societies. (Emmison et al. 2012, 13-16.)

What changed the research of visual traditional approaches was the concern about the missing function of using the visual data (i.e. photographs, advertising images) for observation. The images acted more in a role of picturing the research reports than an actually object of the study. One of the problems was, that the researchers were not keen to widen the discussion cross or outside of the schools they presented. (Emmison et al. 2012, 13-14.) So it seemed that

the visual data, the images, were not considered as an important or relevant object of the study as written language.

What was not taken in to this discussion was the thought about the language as multiple-system including different kinds of ways to communicate. Stuart Hall defines language following: “...*language is the privileged medium in which we ‘make sense’ of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged. Meanings can only be shared through our common access to language. So language is central to meaning and culture and has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings... Language operates as a representational system. In language, we use signs and symbols - whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects – to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings. Representation through language is therefore central to the process by which meaning is produced.*” (Hall 1997, 1.)

According to Emmison et al. one of the leading visual sociologists, Luc Pauwels, argues that the field of visual research “*is founded on the idea that valid scientific insight in society can be acquired by observing, analyzing and theorizing its visual manifestations: behavior of people and material products of culture*” (2012, 18). Pauwels also points out that the phenomenon of material culture includes artifacts, objects and larger visible structures. These may provide useful information about the society studied. This information embodies values and norms on material or immaterial traits. (Emmison et al. 2012, 19.)

Emmison et al. present the image as an object of the study and with this object we are giving visual information and representing the personal meanings and public discourses. When studying these objects we are reading and analyzing them and for this reading we can use the semiotics terms to understand the signs and symbols. So, we as a human being watching and analyzing the images, answer the questions about human interactions. (Emmison et al. 2012, 13-14.) For this research, images are purely representations of the subculture they are representing in the context and discourse of social media. With this statement I mean that the images are studied as a language that Stuart Hall earlier described. The images studied make sense of the culture they are representing.

The research of the female snowboarders is not trying to generalize the snowboarding culture. The material studied here is contradictory as it is at the same time personal, almost “family album”, but supposedly, also willfully chosen by these famous personas behind the Instagram profiles, to show of their existing wide and new audiences. These audiences are unknown and

mostly strangers behind the social media profiles. According to Emmison et al. this kind of voluntarily uploaded personal visual material in web, includes valuable insights about subcultures and individuals and groups involved (2012, 21). So as an example, the subculture in this study is the female snowboarders and when they produce the data studied here, the “community” of female snowboarders produces it. To illustrate, when these individuals of community are making the decisions of what is shown public and what they want to show, this kind of visual data is more valid than for example researcher based data producing the insight and choices of the researchers.

It is not said that the research of culture, or especially visual culture, is only qualitative research even it usually is. According to Emmison et al. in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Jane Richardson and A.L. Kroeber studied changes in women’s dress over a period of three centuries using quantitative methods. They studied images using a standard content analysis method. The dresses were measured and then analyzed during the time periods. Emmison et al. also notes the other quantitative research performed by Dwight Robinson (1976), when he was looking the variations in men’s facial hair. In both studies, it was impossible to show that the analysis based on visual material as the results were presented and summarized in the form of statistic tables and time-series figures. (Emmison et al. 2012, 64-65.) Content analysis in the visual research enables the coding of the image and with counting the codes it is valid to present the result in the form of statistical tables and time-series figures. This in the other hand shows that quantitative research is uncovering the possible hidden signs and symbols in the images. (Emmison et al. 2012, 73.)

During the last decades cultural studies have been the home for scholars especially interested in the visual culture research. Interpreting the images with a discipline demands not only concepts but also a basic ‘working knowledge’. Emmison et al. presents in their book *Introducing Qualitative Methods series: Researching the visual* (2012) different concepts on researching the visual. These are binary oppositions (i.e. man: woman, light: dark), frames (including the hermeneutic circle), genre (categorizing i.e. news, sports, fashion, romantic, drama, comic), identifications (viewers relate to the image), narrative (storyline or i.e. series of images in chronological order), reading (decoding the image with varies by who is reading and why is reading), denotations (literal or common-sense meaning of sign or image, or the first level of signification), connotation (denotation negotiating with dominant cultural values or the second level of signification), signifier/signified (based on semiotics and typology i.e. iconic representations, index, symbol) and subject position (the identity of a viewer when gazing the image). (Emmison et al. 2012, 73-76.)

Emmison et al. suggests ways in which objects can be incorporated into small-scale visual research. For this they are using four different questions. First the question of cultural consumption concerning in the ways “...*things can be used to indicate social status, cultural belonging and taste preferences...*” (2012, 110.) When people are interacting through objects the researchers are able to see how people see themselves and the levels and forms of cultural capital. Secondly they are focusing on personalization which focuses on “..*creative ways transforming mass-produces objects to display individuality and identity*” (2012, 110). Third question is about the use of the objects as the objects can be used to present the social activity or leaving marks of using the objects. Last but not least Emmison et al. asks about culture, knowledge, belief and ideology. These contents are explored by viewing the social values, discourses and epistemologies in objects and how these can be read from the objects or even researching, how the objects are used to tell about the social. This last question leans heavily on the semiotic and interpretive methods. (Emmison et al. 2012, 111.)

Visual culture material varies from 2D images to 3D images and living visual data (the social places where living is happening) not to forget the living forms of visual data and virtual visual data. Or this is how Emmison et al. categorizes the different forms of visual data. With the living visual data they are meaning the places where people interact as they see the spaces reflecting the cultural systems where they are embedded. (Emmison et al. 2012, 153.) In this form, the concern is on the questions of the motion, visibility and invisibility, patterning zones, object and activities. Emmison et al. lean this form into the Foucault’s study about spaces and disciplinary practices when researching visibility and social control (2012, 177). Environments are coded to encourage a particular kind of looking (2012, 180-181).

According to Emmison et al., sociologist Erving Goffman presents one example of interpreting the visual data. Goffman has identified and presented the eight territories of one self. One of them is the persona space. This means the space, surrounding individual and when someone or something enters into this space, the individual might feel unpleasant and even withdraw from the space. The second finding of Goffman’s territories of one self is ‘the stall’ which means the space to which individuals can lay a temporary claim in example “favorite chair, towel on the beach, place at the table”. When studying this ‘stall’ it is possible to focus on the objects used to mark temporary occupancy. Third territory is the ‘use space’ that is the immediately individual surrounding space, i.e. the space between the photographer and object. Fourth territory is ‘the turn’ and means the queues what are telling i.e. how people create local social order. (Emmison et al. 2012, 196-199.)

The living forms of the visual data, differentiates from the living visual data (presented above) with focusing on the activities of people instead of the spaces where interactions happen. They summarize the idea well when saying: *“Social life is very much a play of embodied signs through which people display identity, status and competence as well as an awareness of the rules of social life themselves”* (Emmison et al.). According to Emmison et al. also Loftland, Simmel and Goffman have pointed out the importance of reviewing of visual information happening in everyday social life. People act to give impressions. To give impression, perfect tool is body. So how the body can be used for this impression making? The body can be modified, adorned and moved. The use of body in self-expression is the ‘body language’. With our bodies we are producing and receiving hundreds of signals what are there to be read. What really matters, on reading the signals, is that the researchers attend them in theoretically and methodologically discipline ways. (Emmisson et al. 2012, 183, 201.)

In this study, the research concept mixes up, towards Emmisson et al. concepts earlier, identifications, reading and in subject position. With identification, I as interpreter relate to the image, which is possible as I identify myself to the women behind the images with same kind of interest of life. By reading (decoding the image) I mean the practical analysis by which I will understand the images. This part of the research, with the careful thought of the reasons and personas behind the reading, there is discipline in this study. The same careful thought is continued in the subject position (the identity of a viewer when gazing the image). With these tools I believe it is possible to find out the contents of this subculture and describe the values and interest of their lives.

Categorizing the women snowboarders’ images on different themes and organizing them demonstrates the interpreting through the signs that are readable from the different objects inside the images. I.e. sub-board is representing to me the activity of a surfer. The surfers again are in my imagination free-living, extreme activity lovers, sunbathed and fit young adults. They maintain the values of personal freedom, fun in the nature, dangerous and extreme as salt in their life. This again means, that with one object, these women can create an image of their social status, sport activity preferences and brands behind the object. The objects, places, surroundings, just stuff on their hands, can be seen also presenting their individuality and identity.

But as it is presented during this chapter, valid visual research requires discipline: a theory to back up the interpretation and back up the research. As discipline I have chosen the Mika Hannula’s Critical Theory presented in his book Everything or nothing – Critical Theory,

Contemporary Art and Visual Culture (2003). This theory I have found very useful to interpret images, even it is created for the need of interpret contemporary art. Hannula's theory is simple: to format meaning in the need of the discussion. Discussion requires the following understanding: location of the author in the discussion, familiarity of the background, ability to articulate own space and time and dialogue between theory and practice. In the following chapter I will present the theory more deeply.

### *2.3 Critical Theory giving the tools to read the images and participate into the discourse*

Critical Theory is most known as a concept of Frankfurt's school from early 20th century. This theory is viewing the society (or culture) from the critical perspective. How it differentiates from the traditional social theory is that the traditional social theory is trying to understand and explain the society and culture instead of criticizing it. Critical theory in culture studies is known about the arguments that culture should be autonomous from the markets (Gartman 2012, xii). In the critical cultural studies there are mostly present the questions about the equality, class position, dominant mass-culture, consuming culture products, power, capitalism and markets. And more over culture as a tool to order and classify people. (Gartman 2012, 1-11.) More over critical theory is a principal about constructive criticism. This means that the information received is reviewed from the context and location of receiver of the information. The information, the opinion or the discovery is reviewed with the question of "what does this information tells about my life, my relationship towards myself and my environment surrounding?" (Virtuaaliamk 2.4.2017.)

The discipline, based on the critical theory, used in this study has come from Mika Hannula's need to provide discipline to art students, especially in art and visual culture field. The parallel to Frankfurt's school's critical theory is that the Hannula criticizes the dominating concepts and practices to take part into the discourse of art and visual culture in the society. His critical questions are: where things happen and how things happen, and most of all, how practice is linking to the tradition and contemporary discourse. According to Hannula contemporary art and visual culture can no longer shut down from the reality surrounding. Analysis of own actions and motives are needed because everything is part of everything. Actors of the visual culture need to come out from the superficial knowledge of one's medium. Hannula is seeking that theoretical and linguistic tools take part again into the practice of art. (Hannula 2005, 14-15.) By accepting the reality (expectations and pressure of the environment) one

may realize the potential of critical theory that is “*author learns to articulate and understand his or her own art in relation to his or her needs and relevant discourse*” (Hannula 2003, 15).

Hannula (2003) is framing the visual culture in contemporary art. But in this study I will use his tools to view and analyze visual culture in other context. As it has been mentioned already earlier few times, the context is the professional female snowboarders’ representations in social media channel Instagram. The choice of this theory is simple. As pointed out previously, there are numerous methods and viewpoints to research visual material. For instance narratology or analyzing with stories inside the pictures could be relevant approach. Narratology holds lot of categorizing and systematic ways to treat the material. This feels to me personally too much on the psychological way to read pictures and complicated to understand in the context of the study. Hannula states well also my personal concern of visual research “*How is it possible that visual culture can so intensely lean on language and linguistic arguments*” (Hannula 2003, 9). After founding and using Hannula’s theory in practice (study work for visual methodology course) it felt natural to use it in the research of visual culture. Hence it is born for the need to analyze visual culture by non-linguistic methods.

Hannula calls his critical theory a structure. This structure is a theory including almost all the theoretical discourses, according to him. Towards all theoretical discourses, there is one condition. This condition is that the thinking has a critical view of a thinker and the environment he/she is located. Hannula notes that theory is not a certain or definite answer, neither it is end of something but more like a tool. And when using tools we have to know where, how and why we are using those. (Hannula 2003, 9-12.)

This research bases on the thought that what matters when studying images is the environment where the image is presented or in the other words, context and the location of the image. This means that the image is not only a photo separated from the space or place but also it includes the discussion surrounding and penetrating the image. Mika Hannula explains this approach following:

*“ What we need, for the formation of meaning, is open and transparent participation. Participation in discussion, which in turn imposes at least the following conditions: 1) the locating of the author in the discourse, 2) familiarity with the background and history of the discourse, which is a fundamental requirement to prevent history from repeating itself*



*needlessly or destructively, 3) the ability to articulate ones' own space and location, 4) productive appropriation of dialogue between theory and practice."* (Hannula 2003, 13-14.)

So the critical theory is a theoretical background and gives the tools to observe the meanings so fragile and the meanings produced by individual viewer. The context, term what can mean almost everything and can be used to refer everything (Hannula 2003, 18), is an important factor of looking the meanings in the practice of art from the viewpoint of critical theory especially. In the study of the female snowboarder images in the social media, the context is the question of female snowboarding culture and the representations of their culture through the images posted on the social media channel in the year 2016. In the following subtitles I will open the definitions of context, location, discourse and identity in the concept of Mika Hannula's discipline that will be the tool to interpret the images.

### *2.3.1 Context and location of the context*

I try to describe the word context by following: context is an environment where the matter or thing exists or occurs. The matter or thing changes its meanings depending on the different variables inside the context. These variables are the persons speaking about the matter or thing (i.e. their values and expectations), the background knowledge and history of the matter or thing and in what situation it is evaluated. Context delimits the discussion and prevents the unessential and discrete from the discussion. There is always need for delimitation in the context and researcher needs to do it. And that is because the discussion needs to stay in the context.

Hannula's structure underlines that the context must always be defined and delineated again and again in every different situation. Contexts are limited by choosing the permanent place that is also logical, credible, self-critical, developing and self-reflexive. Placing the context demands the information from the background, circumstances and the situation. This again is taking in concern a historical, political, social, and economic as well as psychological scopes. This could be a worldview that is a concept of reality. It tells how something is and why it is. Also the worldview tells the interests, capacities and means what are behind the worldview in each particular time, space and situation. This means that contexts are more complex and so on, more focused. (Hannula 2003, 18-19.)

Context is not a solution even it summarizes the meanings in the discourse. More over the context is part of the problem. By context we are participating to the interpretation, and in the interpretation there is always someone's values and purposeful behind the interpretation. So, there is no absolute truth or final solution in the context. When we are defining, we can base the definitions on chosen context (even though it is a certain situation or context in larger scale). Context has according the Hannula four dimensions:

- 1) *the chosen situation, time and place*
- 2) *historical and thematic background*
- 3) *positioning and participation (maintenance of discourse)*
- 4) *the network to other context (simultaneous, preceding or future)*

(Hannula 2003, 19).

To understand the meanings and reasons in the context there must examine the location of the context. This is the place where is shown the assertion, expression and interpretation - the opinion. This is the location, the situation, where the discussion stops for a moment to disclose the opinion. (Hannula 2003, 19-20.)

At the same time there is the question of the formation and the transformation of time and place. Who are there present in the location? Who have the right to participate in the discussion? (Hannula 2003, 20-21.) In this case, the participation is allowed to the ones who are the authors behind the images but also those who are looking them. I will claim that the images in the Instagram are the "art pieces" of the persons behind the profiles. Like Hannula says: "*In the field of contemporary art and visual culture, concepts are primarily tools to situating oneself and one's environment, and the relationship between the two.*" (2003,21). I understand that with the images these snowboarding women are placing themselves in the context of female snowboarding culture.

When talking about the participation it comes in different scales. First the artists communicate with each other. Secondly there is the participation of the inner circle, the ones who are close to the context. After these there is enough appraisal to others, outside of the context, to participate in the discussion. In the first state it is crucial to find the right group or network of matters to compare, compete, borrow, imitate, refine and develop the matters of evaluation. (Hannula 2003, 21.) Reviewing this from the point of this study, the first state is the images and women discussing about their culture in Instagram, secondly there is this study taking part of their discussion by analysing their representations and thirdly what comes after this

study, those who are reading the study and making their own opinions. Now the discussion, conversation and discourse can start.

### 2.3.2 Discourse

After the location of the context is found, the discourse starts. What does these images tell about female snowboarding culture? As the images are the statements and like Hannula quotes *Stuart Hall*: “*A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic.*” (Hannula 2003, 21.)

It is not straightforward that everyone understands what they are seeing and how these signs seen are impacting on the way of behaving and on what is wanted and desired. I can't say that all the viewers understand the female snowboarding culture same as I interpret it. The signs are the codes registered in the minds to understand. So, the visual culture is seen as a language of own (using the signs as words) and to be able to take part in the discussion there must be the understanding of the required knowledge from all the fields of anything because the contemporary art, or contemporary culture in this case, is linking to everything in the society (Hannula 2003, 10).

Discourse, or conversation is always placed on certain time and place. It holds the interaction with argumentation and listening. Discourse has a history, a present and a future. It collects the statements arguing, intruding, adjusting and striking each other. (Hannula 2003, 21.) Stuart Hall states that discourses formulate their own ideas, the right and false truth (Hannula 2003, 22). And Hannula again compares this to Mikko Lehtonen (1996) emphasis that discourses are not permanent or logical but discourses are developing sites in meaning making. According to Hannula, Lehtonen states three characters of discourses. These are: 1) discourses are social practices rewriting the social reality, 2) discourses do not operate alone, they function in relation to other discourses, 3) discourses develop in the conversations. (Hannula 2003, 22.)

When there is a discourse, there should also be the understanding of the concept of the critical reflections. These reflections outline the discourse and discussion background and current situation into the present reality. Hannula describes the expectations and prejudices, the awareness and deconstruction of prejudices. This is where the knowledge is basing, where the

knowledge is filtered interpreted and developed further. Secondly that is also crucial when the discourse has more participants. (2003, 23-24.)

The critical reflection has different states also. The conscious reflection is conscious about the discovery, thought or action just made. Affective reflection is conscious about the own emotions towards the matter or thing reflected. Sorting reflection is conscious about our own values effecting to our discoveries found, our thoughts, our actions and our way to view these. When reflecting, the concept understands the meanings of the concepts used. Mental reflection is aware of the dissection made with the restricted information. Theoretical reflection is knowledge about that absorbed reflection-system consists of transparency of the cultural and psychological presumptions. This again describes the experience less satisfying than the functional criteria based viewpoints. (VirtuaaliAMK 2.4.2017.)

The way to enter into the discourse is simply in the need to communicate. And when you start the communication, it is necessary to start defining the matters in the discourse. Definitions need to be creditable and convincing to one and to the others. (Hannula 2003, 23.) And through the discourse the viewer will be able to understand the identity of own in relation to the context and location where the discourse is held.

### 2.3.3 Identity

Identity can mean *“The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness.”* (Oxford English Dictionary 2.4.2017). The definition I prefer more specific is *“The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition of being a single individual; the fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.”* (Oxford English Dictionary 2.4.2017). Hannula again describes identity as *“a continuous search for a coherent and meaningful frame and content for the self”* (2003, 26). All the three definitions hide the truth inside them and are functional on the proper place and time. But the identity is very important when finding out the self-meaning from the discourses. To understand the identities of snowboarding women it is coherent to investigate the identities found from their representations.

Identities include too history, the time and place, sex and genre, the religion, sexuality, politics, work, hobbies and whatever experience (Hannula 2003, 26). Identity is a construction

of oneself and the surrounding environment. The avoidable thing is that both, oneself and the environment affect and change identities. This affect and change includes the comparison of sameness and difference. The process of identity is affected by the discussion and negotiation of the participants in the discussions through the relation and reflection of oneself's background. When oneself meets the encounter, the other participant, the process starts. And the process is the link to the reality and to the society. This process tells how the individual stands in the relation to the community and so on to the culture. (Hannula 2003, 26-27.)

In this study it is more or less about my identity, the researcher's identity, and about the identity behind the snowboarding women. How I, as a researcher, engage to the images by reading them and to the visual culture in generally is one point to evaluate through the process. To evaluate this, we need to consider what is meaning making and understanding meanings. Understanding meanings request looking, viewing and interpreting them and this is the consideration in the following subtitle.

#### *2.4 Practise of looking as part of the reading the visual culture*

In this chapter I view the process of looking and seeing. With Marita Sturken's and Lisa Cartwrights thoughts about ideologies and visual culture I will draw the outlines to significance of practices of looking.

My presumption is, that the images in the Instagram, are the representations of the values of women snowboarding culture and at the same time professional female snowboarder images in Instagram are creating and maintaining the values in women snowboarding culture. What is seen, is again reflecting on the experience of the viewer, on the experience of mine, creating new meanings and opening new knowledge bases, to me. The shared language, the codes, between the images and me helps to understand, describe and define what is seen (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 12).

It is obvious that *"our lives are increasingly dominated by the visual and communication technologies that allow for the global circulation of ideas, information, and politics"* (Sturken & Cartwright 2009, 1). That is why it is important to study the various forms of shared understandings and for example how meanings go around through variety of visual forms and how the visual effects on the society (Sturken & Cartwright 2009, 1). The images and

participating on visual by looking launches the chain of events. These events are the experiences of looking at the same time provoking feelings and meanings from the different experiences. This means again that visual experiences are not sited in certain time or space. The visual experiences are full of memories and other experiences from different aspects of our lives. (Sturken & Cartwright 2009, 2.)

There are human given meanings to different objects like phone, painting, cup, or car. But at the same time the objects create meanings. Meanings are created by us gazing them, using them to communication or just showing the power through them, to ourselves or in the social networks. The meanings and the values are in exchange between people all the time. This exchange means that the objects such as images have principles, opinions and suppliers. (Sturken & Cartwright 2009, 2.)

In addition, according to Sturken and Cartwright, Roland Barthes describes the different kind of levels of producing meanings at the same time for the same viewers in two terms: *denotative and connotative*. Let say one object, image, denote certain unquestioned truth, providing documentary like evidence from the current situation. The same image may connote less practical information but more real, more distinct meaning. These connotative meanings come from the cultural and historical context of the image. (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 20.)

The connotation, found from the images, is expressing the cultural values and beliefs. Roland Barthes uses term myth to refer the connotation. This myth of the image is the set of rules and conventions that are presented to the wider audience through the meanings. These meanings are hidden in the images and these are specific to this specific group. The connotation of the image is also possible to use in a denotative way. In this case the meanings can produce a myth or stereotype. Sturken and Cartwright use an example of the representation of beauty. That could be “*ultra-thin bodies*”, which is promoting that certain body types are universally more attractive than others. The connotation and denotation are useful when there is the question of the photographic truth. (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 21.)

Nevertheless, there are always several people viewing that one thing. These people hardly have the exactly same thoughts and experiences from the object, about this image. There are different meanings to different people. Even if these people share the same culture the interpretation might be different. Same meaning making and meaning exchange is present in the discussion and negotiation between the people and objects. There is people who are loud

and then again silent and for example people with more authority. So even the people's mind plays a big role in meaning making, the influence is made in the conversation between the viewers, objects and the meanings. Interpretations then again generate the cultures and groups' shared worldview. (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 4.)

Images include dynamic of social power and ideology. Ideologies again are systems of belief, existing in all cultures. The images are the way to maintain and reflect the ideologies. Sturken and Cartwright define ideologies "*...as the broad but indispensable shared sets of values and beliefs through which individuals live out their complex relations in arrange of social networks. Ideologies are widely varied and intersect at all the levels of all cultures, from religions to politics to choices in fashion. Our ideologies are diverse and ubiquitous.*" (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 23). In conclusion of this definition of ideology, with this study I am also testing how much my ideology, my set of values in life, is reflected from the images of these four women.

What are the ideological values then? For example, the ideological values could be freedom, personal and social development, importance of home and glorifying the nature. These ideological values are shouted and showed in social networks in intention to proclaim how life is and how it should be. And with the images we all are engaging to share, to agree and disagree. Today with the developing technologies and digital image making it is not obvious that the images and ideologies presented through them are natural. Or then we approve that the images present the nature of the ones made the image. (Sturken & Cartwright 2009, 23.)

But most of all, when we are practicing looking, we must remember the importance of the context of the image, the location of the image and the discourse we are participating not to forget the identity of one's own. This is important because, any image with means within can change dramatically in different context, location and discourse.

#### *2.4.1 Role of the gaze in practices of looking*

Gaze means the act of looking intently (OED 3.4.2017). The concept of *the gaze* is an important part of the practice of looking but also it plays important feature in the feminist theory of the constitution of the human subject (viewer) in its discursive context. This means that the critical theory in visual culture studies owe to the feminism what comes to the practices of looking, as the feminist theory emphasis embodied social activity, and what

comes to the constitution of the subjectivity, the human subject (the viewer). (Mirzoeff 2013, 311.)

According to Amelia Jones (2010) feminism is one of the most remarkable theories in the field of visual culture. Feminism has effected as one of the main factors in growing field of visual culture study, as it has been one of the critiques of the art and film works. And so on the critique towards genre roles and the representations, for example the representations of the women in images in different contexts, has grown to be part of the feminist visual culture studies. Feminist work with the key issues and aspects found from the ways of seeing and practices of looking. And how these actions are organized around the viewer position that is based on the identity. In different contexts the key to organize the term in visual culture studies comes from the crossing points of gender, sexuality, race, class and ability. To these terms are possible to include the subcultures and other intersectional identity groupings. (Mirzoeff 2013, 311.)

In the chapter 2.4 I pointed out the significance of ideologies. Louis Althusser has again pointed out that *“ideology cannot adequately be understood as false consciousness or as existing within moral framework of right and wrong beliefs, good and bad representations or practices”* (Mirzoeff 2013, 314), for example positive against negative representations of women. The feminist theory has developed from this point, from criticising the images of women (or their non-appearance in the representations), to the questions about desire and looking in the discourse of the gaze. (Mirzoeff 2013, 314.)

According to Cartwright (Mirzoeff 2013, 312-313), feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey presented at 1970s one of the key concepts in practices of looking and considering the relationship between sexuality and the gaze as relational practice. This concept is the visual pleasure. I understand the visual pleasure as an individual mental or physical emotion or feeling when looking, directing our behaviour, needs and later also values. With the concept of visual pleasure Mulvey also presented the way formal elements organizes the way spectator (viewer) look, setting up a sexual dynamic of the gaze (Mirzoeff 2013, 312-313). The discussion about pleasure and desire brought the concept of spectatorship into the discourse of looking. Spectatorship means the understanding of that the set of beliefs, desires, and needs with the set of coded language is commanding the way of viewer sees. (Mirzoeff 1998, 21-22.)



According to Cartwright (Mirzoeff 2013) Jacquelin Rose brought the theory of visual and the gaze influencing, not only in the visual images and media texts, but also how the viewers negotiate about the world through the practice of looking. She was the one noting that the subject (viewer) engages in networks of looks and looking. Rose's concept of the gaze is not a looking practice of an individual but more like a stage where viewers perform and interact with others and objects. Rose described the field of vision as one that is always structured around and through desire and sexual difference. This means that the desire and sexuality are not just reflected from the images, but are also arranging the practices of looking in connection to power and agency. (Mirzoeff 2013, 315.)

Linda Nochlin (Mirzoeff 2013) again introduced the concept of 'female gaze' as a standing point to the concept of dominant 'male gaze'. This 'male gaze' has the power to organize the aesthetic and formal aspect. But as noted later in the field of feminist visual culture studies, female gaze is not always bound on the masculinity and femininity of one's biological status or body. Sexuality of one's plays important role in the gaze, for example the gaze of queers of the outcome of women run sex tabloids for lesbian audiences. (Mirzoeff 2013, 318-319.)

On the side of the practices of looking and concept of the gaze is the one who is viewing. When talking about the role of the viewer, the key concern is in the aspects in image of touching the viewer. These aspects connect the viewer in to the image. Before we start the interpretation of the image we feel that the image touches us, or then not. These feelings may affect on the opinion we are making of the image. This part of looking is insidious and it can be totally controlled, but it can be taken in concern when interpreting the images.

During this chapter I have presented the basic elements of cultural studies, visual culture studies and critical theory. I have opened the theories and disciplines structuring this study. I have also defined some main concepts what comes to the studying visual. These are the context, location, discourse, identity, and practice of looking, ideology and the gaze. With this chapter I have tried to understand the complex field of visual culture study and make some outlines for the viewpoints with I'm taking part on the discourse of women's snowboarding culture. In the following chapter I will focus on opening the concepts of social media and studying representations in the context of digital technology and Internet.

### 3 CONTEXT OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA

The presentation form of visual culture in the papers and television is challenged by Internet and virtual reality (Mirzoeff 1999, 1). More and more the communication of ours is happening in the digital media and web (World Wide Web). Producers of the content are not the big media houses only. The users of the web and social platforms are even larger actors than the media industry in producing the content in Internet. There are various ways to take part in the world of Internet. User can choose if the presence of ones is visible or invisible.

Today, lots of people are using the forms of Internet to produce own text based galleries, aka blogs, to inform about their life, share important matters of everyday life to followers or just to earn living by selling their imago and lifestyle. Social media is gathering everyone and making everything possible, even getting rich too. We exist in the real world but we also exist in the virtual. To give an impression and to draw a face to our real life in virtually and real life representation in the web, we are using lot of images. The mobile phones and technology has enabled to be connected virtually 24/7. And with the newest technology we have the newest cameras and with the possibility to do graphic design to images in the phones, we all are really good photographers and imago creators. According to Barnett, Copeland, Makemson and Motley, everyone can choose to be a writer, a photographer, a designer, or filmmaker; all together in the new media of Internet (2011, 6).

In this chapter I will concentrate on describing the world of Internet and social media. I will keep it short and condensed, as I believe that the concept of Internet, in this research, means the place where photos are viewed. So, it is important part of the interpretation to consider the location of the photos, but more important is, what is in the pictures. Internet and social media have major role interpreting the images as a matter affecting on the interpretation. However, this study is not focusing on studying the Internet as form to represent one or how people behave virtually for example. Based on these reasons, I will not open the whole world of research of Internet and the possible approaches Internet and social media gives for a researcher.

### 3.1 Internet, the cyberspace and the social media

Development of visual data and visualization in modern societies has been fast and grew huge due the electronic devices, digital photographing and possibilities of Internet. The exponential growth of Internet is the most notable. Internet has enabled the wealth of non-textual data and non-textual communicative options. Social media channels like YouTube, Flickr and Facebook connect millions of users and contributors. Moreover, they are “*part of our social landscape and irresistible source of limitless free data*”. (Emmison et al. 2012, 16.) The developments in the technologies are positive when noting that the reduction of the cost of video recording (everyone can make videos with the mobile phones today), low-limen availability of editing software and photo manipulation. In 2010’s there has been also growing concern with the ethical issues. Not only in qualitative research in generally but in visual research in particular. This visual research concern focuses on privacy, appropriate capture and use of images, spying and snooping, and not the least manipulation and deception of images. (Emmison et al. 2012, 16.)

What has increased dramatically is the ubiquity and diversity of visual images. And this has been noted as one of the defining features of postmodern societies. Internet holds on the rise of the visual digital culture. In the field of the visual research the focus has been traditionally on media content like advertising image but recently the attention has shifted to the study of electric visual imagery. (Emmison et al. 2012, 21.) It seems that Internet has replaced the power of television.

According to Susanna Paasonen, leading popular Internet researcher in Finland, Internet is not monotonic stage where every subject is presented in one context. Paasonen suggests that Internet we know today is a cyberspace where it is possible to create and narrate different kind of realities, represent desired personalities and characters and communicate without the rules and presumptions of the “real” life. And like Paasonen emphasizes Internet is not unreality but a parallel reality where dominates different kind of values and practices. (Paasonen 2002, 8-9.)

The cyberspace is giving the opportunity for users to “be who ever they like” equally. This means also that the social status is not disappearing but it does not value the users as actors in the discourses but more like add various voices and viewpoints in the representations and in receiving and reading the information. (Paasonen 2002, 9.) According to Paasonen the

personal home pages and online identities relate in issues of identity, character and personality (Paasonen 2002, 17).

In addition, Faye Grinsburg has studied how the cyberspace is opening possibilities for the indigenous cultures (Mirzoeff 2013, 615). In her conclusions the actors inside the indigenous cultures use the digital media as a stage to recover their histories, to correct the land rights, improve the knowledge bases and to communicate in larger context in the communities created into cyberspace. In Grinsburg's studies the productions and forms of art presented in the cyberspace had reached the status of activism, fighting on the behalf of the indigenous cultures. (Mirzoeff 2013, 615-617.)

Without the context, the representations and discourses in the cyberspace are never problem-free. Both Paasonen (2002, 10-11) and Grinsburg (Mirzoeff 2013, 616) lift up the questions about the rights to produce and represent the information in the cyberspace. Who has the access and ability to use the information and create the knowledge base of the community? How the information produced is following the ethics of cultures, communities and individuals. The question about the power is rising: who's information is presented and why?

In recent years, in the research field of Internet, the studies of social media have emerged. Social media's different platforms are, for the users of Internet, to gather, meet, share, discuss and create an imago, all at the same place and same time. Social media term is referred when speaking about social network sites. The most important feature of social media is the information and idea sharing between people. The most known social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Flickr and Instagram for example. Digital media has integrated into our social life as natural part of our everyday life. This means that before known separation between communication and interaction, online and offline and "real life" has become obsolete. (Lövheim, Jansson, Paasonen & Sumiala 2013, 26.)

In addition, Christian Fuchs (2011, 1) states that, to understand social media requires comprehension of the individual and collective meanings presented by different users, platform owners/CEOs/shareholders, companies, advertisers, politicians and other observers. Moreover, understanding social media requires analyzing the reasons and ways the companies operate through social media to achieve profits as, according to Fuchs, social media is mix of culture and economy (2011, 1). Niklas Woerman (2012, 618) notes that there have been a number of studies examining the consumers' interaction in virtual space but less has concentrated on how social media transforms consumers' bodily practices.

Judith Donath, the leading researcher of social communities and Internet, states that social world of Internet is not yet as social interactive as it is when human interact face-to-face. She continues that Internet needs to develop “...*interfaces that work with how we see and respond to the world around us*” (Donath 2014, 6). Understanding the contrast, but also believing that we have succeeded to design applications that are making the interaction between humans more close to the face-to-face communication. Social media channels like Instagram and Snapchat has launched the possibility to make short video clips easily and quickly to send it to whoever found from the contact list. In Facebook and in Instagram it is possible to be “on-air” or “online” real time. Of course, there is always the screen and the distance between the subject and the object. But I state that more familiar we come with this kind of technology, more it replaces the original way to communicate and be interactive with each other.

What we can agree, is that social media is a proof that digital media in general is fundamentally interactive. This again means that social media “...*make social interaction more immediate and responsive than earlier media form, something that has various consequences for how we relate to each other and think about society today*” (Lövheim, Jansson, Paasonen & Sumiala 2013, 26).

Social media can be people participating in different activities online. These activities are posting pictures and videos, writing articles, blogs, reviews, updating information in different sites, finding information, or just playing multiplayer games. But the main activity in Internet is talking with each other. The conversation is happening through emails, chat, discussion postings, status updates, comments exchanged by photos and articles for example. (Donath 2014, 131.) Adding the photos or posting images in the platforms is part of the conversation. The language is based on different non-textual signs, but with the images people are taking part of the conversation inside communities of themselves or, in larger scale, conversations relating to national and global considers.

In social media we are able to present our looks, clothes, and bodies through images. Not to forget the environments we are living, the events we are taking part and all the interesting things we are confronting in our lives. In conclusion Internet, cyberspace, is more and more the channel to represent personalities of individuals, images of the people and phenomena. This channel of the representation enables the communication in different discourses and contexts. This proves, that the professional women Instagram account images are part of the larger phenomenon of living cultures spreading into the cyberspace. The actions inside the

culture are not existing only in the places where they snowboard but also in the galleries of social media.

The “real” life is not something outside or surrounding the cyberspace. The “real” life is today happening more and more in the cyberspace. The cyberspace is the “real” life. The cyberspace is not trouble-free. The self-presentation of the individuals, organizations, celebrities and phenomena in the cyberspace may present only selected features and actions to influence on the way wanted. What is experienced in the cyberspace are as real as ever but the experiences are different from the ones we take part in face-to-face communication. Technology is changing fast and what comes to researching Internet the theories may change quickly.

### 3.2 Instagram

The photos studied in this research are viewed from the social media platform Instagram. Instagram has today over 600 million users. Founders Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger launched the photo sharing application for the smartphones in 2010. (Instagram 23.4.2017) Application allows its users to take photos, use filters to shape the photos and share the photos in variety of social networks including Instagram itself. In 2012 Facebook bought Instagram. That changed the commercial content of the application allowing the user information to be used for marketing and posting adds to the users of the Instagram. (Benjamin, 2012.)

Sheldon and Bryant (2016) have been studying motives for using Instagram. According to them Instagram is the fastest growing social network globally (2016, 89). In 18 months from the launch of the application it had amassed over 30 million users (Benjamin 2012). The idea of the application is to share photos and videos online. With the hashtags (#) users connect the photos in the larger network of photos and with the hashtags they can also find other photos. Hashtags can be whatever people want to, i.e. #fitmama for fitness mom or #lovemyjob for showing really loving one’s work. Instagram photo sharing is some point similar as in Facebook but in Instagram, users have in their use several filters to change the colours and resolutions of the photos before posting the photos. (Sheldon & Bryant 2016, 89.)

According to Sheldon and Bryant (2016) Sarah-Rosie Marcus has studied Instagram and social media by example analysing the photos in Instagram (2016, 90). Marcus has found (2015) that compared to Facebook or other photo-sharing applications “*Instagram is based more on one’s personal identity rather than relational identity*” (Sheldon & Bryant 2016, 90).

According to Marcus, people use Instagram to self-promote, and unlike Facebook, it does not focus on social relationships as much. One of the most used posts in Instagram, were “selfies”. Selfies are photographs that individuals are taking of themselves and then using them as to elucidate people’s individuality. The socialisation in Instagram is happening through the hashtags what comes to Marcus’s analyses.

Sheldon and Bryant (2016) introduce another visual culture and social media researcher Tim Highfield, who has studied Australians using the hashtag in Instagram during the Eurovision song contest. Highfield has found that, compared to Twitter, Instagram images are lasting longer than tweets. Even the photos are posted as often as tweets. According to Highfield, Instagram is more personal social media channel including the selfies and photos of people’s home. Both Marcus and Highfield have used in their studies the content analysis of limited number of Instagram photos from the publicly available profiles. (Sheldon, Bryant 2016, 90.)

My own personal use of Instagram is daily. I’m not posting the photos every day, maybe once or twice in a month, but I’m really following and viewing what others are posting. Based on my own notions, Instagram is now what Facebook was when it started: personal, social and more individual based. Today Facebook is, from my perspective, a huge newsfeed of everything. And we are trying to manage all the information; private and open, friends, work colleagues, gym, presidents, newspapers, and every other organization is posting. And when more the information has gone to the organisation based less there is information from the individual users, or the messages are not intimate anymore. On the other hand, in the Instagram images people are showing their everyday life and sharing their intimate moments like they used to do in Facebook.

The newest possibility in Instagram is to post short video clips as an Instastory. It seems that people are more and more open in front of the camera and filming oneself is easy and low limen for them. These performances of ours in social media, and especially in Instagram, tell a lot about today’s humans. We are used to be photographed and filmed, we know how to present ourselves in the virtual spaces, and we are expressing ourselves and our intensions without hesitation or self-shame and creating messages that are universally readable. Through the profiles and the images of them we are connecting to the important matters of us. Cultures and the icons of the cultures are attainable globally and with our mind we can be part whatever we want.

In this chapter I have described the phenomenon of Internet, social media and Instagram, and some of the concerns of researching the world of Internet. The focus in this chapter was to delineate the reasons for using social media in this research and my own personal experiences of using Facebook and Instagram. This delineation is also to give a picture of the world where the audiences, viewers, users and photo sharers view and post the images that are the main interest in this study.



## 4 DEFINING THE CONCEPTS

The way to enter into the discourse is simply the need to communicate. And when you start the communication, it is necessary to start defining the matters in the discourse. Definitions need to be creditable and convincing to one and to the others. (Hannula 2003, 23.)

In this chapter I will define the main concepts for my research. I will go through the descriptions of the concepts culture, visual culture, and image and interpreting representations. There are various definitions what come to the concepts and terms. With the definitions I will locate my arguments in the certain context.

### 4.1 Female snowboarding culture

As an observer and researcher, it is important to open the background and thoughts one's own about culture. As an educated culture manager, for one thing this means, I should have understanding about the culture and society, not just because of the education but also because the personal interests and experiences. With this statement it is to be noted that every person should think more about their relationship to culture, where they belong or not belong to and society where they live and act. Participating in the variety of hobbies, organizations and actions people start to understand the culture; language, behavior, rules, ideals, interests and actions. Mirzoeff states, *"There is no outside to culture... Using culture as a term of reference is both problematic and inescapable"* (1999, 23).

Oxford English Dictionary defines culture as a word for: *"Chiefly as a count noun. The distinctive ideas, customs, social behavior, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period. Hence: a society or group characterized by such customs, etc"* (OED 24.4.2014). In Thesaurus culture means example same as *"manner, fashion, way of living or life, way, customary, moeurs, culture and mores"* (OED 24.4.2014). So culture as a term means different things depending on the context where it is discussed.

Stuart Hall defines culture as a term in three different contexts. Firstly there is the classical tradition of high culture, the ultimate best of the best said and done what comes to literature, philosophy and art. Secondly there is the modern culture, mass-culture or popular culture, representing the same as classical but in the postmodern life example popular music, art, design, leisure time and entertainment. (Hall 1997, 2.) This modern culture could be also

understood as a response of “working class” towards the elitist classical high culture according to Simon During (1993, 357) in his editorial introduction of Dick Hebdiges’s article *From Culture to Hegemony*. Third Hall’s definition is the culture that fits more in the social sciences: the culture of peoples, communities, nations or social groups “way of life”. This approach fits on the definition of culture as a shared values and meanings. (Hall 1997, 2.)

The concept of culture in this research is more into the approach of social science and more rooted in the anthropology what comes to Raymond Williams’ definition in his 1958 work *Culture and Society*: “...*particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behavior. The analysis of culture, from such a definition is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture*” (Hebdige 1993, 359). To underline the definition of culture I will note that Roland Barthes believed that the culture is more than artwork or place for the art and that the culture embraces the whole way of life. (Hebdige 1993, 361.)

When culture is known as whole way of life; the elements of culture are “...*meanings, values, intellectual and imaginative works, traditions, the organization of production, family structures, institutional structures, or forms of communication, experiences, structures of feeling, the popular*” (Fuchs 2015, 11). More precisely Stuart Hall describes, “... *culture is about ‘shared meanings’...*” (Hall 1997, 1). And with the shared meanings people are able to represent and take part in their culture.

In this research the culture, female snowboarding, is not fitting on the definition about the culture as “*standard of aesthetic excellence*” (Hebdige 1993, 358-359). The thought of culture as a set of human practices and processes make sense, as without the action behind the objects there is no sense in anything we are doing. So the actors, we, are giving the meanings to objects and actions. We are creating the culture. And with representations we share the meanings and read the cultures.

In this study I will use the term female snowboarding culture or female snowboarding, or just snowboarding culture. With these terms I mean the whole large scene of women (or in even larger scale, the people) who snowboard and are interested of snowboarding. These women are representing their values and way of life, their culture, through their images posted on Instagram accounts. What I’m studying is the first scale of participation of the context, these

women (the artist of female snowboarding) discussing about their culture through the Instagram photos.

#### *4.2 Visual culture and reading visual*

We are living in a visual world where role of the visual is more and more in the center of everyday life. Posting images in the social media channels is not unfamiliar to us anymore. We are following friends, family and strangers in the channels producing thousands and thousands of images. Visual culture is present in newspapers, magazines, television, computer, mobile phones, art exhibitions, and in our everyday actions. Visual culture is communicating; expressing oneself in visual ways and it is leading our choices and orientations.

Sturken and Cartwright state “*We negotiate the world through visual culture*” (2009, 1). For instance they point our lives, which are increasingly dominated by the visual and technologies developed for the human communication, where ideas global and local, information and politics are shared visually. This visual communication plays important role for example at political conflicts and meaning making. The term visual culture, and how I understand it, is defined extensive way by the Sturken and Cartwright. They say the visual culture covers the diverse of media forms ranging from arts to popular culture marketing and information (2009, 1).

Visual itself means for example “...coming, proceeding, or directed from the eye or sight.” (OED 4.4.2017), and “...pertaining or relating to, concerned or connected with, sight or vision.” (OED 4.4.2017). In this study visual is an “...image or display, a picture; spec. the visual element of a film or television production.” (OED 4.4.2017). Nevertheless, from the variety of the different concepts of visual, this study is focusing on a sphere of images and the meanings found from the images by interpreting them.

Mirzoeff has said that in the field of visual, the interpreter’s viewpoint is crucial (1999,1). I’m not insisting that the interpretation of mine is innocent or without any prejudice born from my background, history, lived life and so on. My vision and interpreting is seeing the real objects of the image and what they are telling to me. Also I’m trying to stretch the sight on to the transparent space where my spectatorship is attending with the vision of non-seen or seen in my mind. I understand that these images are including objects, signs, codes and meanings I

won't even recognize. (Mirzoeff 1998, 22.) And on the other hand in the visualizations of everyday life I won't necessarily know what it is that I'm seeing (Mirzoeff 1999, 1).

However, the visual culture is a key term connecting critics in art history, film, cultural studies and sociology (Mirzoeff 1999, 3). How we read images and visual culture is complex. The understanding of the meanings; signs and codes through images is dependable from the context of the image, particular culture we are living, from the memory and experience of the individual and the intention of the image creator or presenter. What comes to knowledge base of my own, my practice of looking, viewing and reading the visual is based truly in the own experience of the life and relationships with others (people, institutions, power, rules, politics, religion, habits, environment, existing and culture).

#### 4.3 Image is the object

Image in the concepts of this study is at the same time the hardest and easiest one to describe. Hard one because the outnumber meanings it can have when it is "*an artificial imitation or representation of something, esp. of a person or the bust of a person*" (OED 4.4.2017). And again easiest when the term image is described to as "*an imitation delineated, painted, executed in relief, stamped, or otherwise produced on a surface; a likeness, portrait, picture, carving, or the like*" (OED 4.4.2017).

Moreover, image is "*a visual representation or counterpart of an object or scene, formed through the interaction of rays of light with a mirror, lens, etc., usually by reflection or refraction*" (OED 4.4.2017). And more precisely image is "*a physical or digital representation of something, originally captured using a camera from visible light, and typically reproduced on paper, displayed on a screen, or stored as a computer file. More generally: any picture or graphic (regardless of origin) displayed on a computer monitor, television, etc., or reproduced in printed form*" (OED 4.4.2017). One can also say image is a photography, produced imitation of something.

Roland Barthes describes the practice of photography in his essay "Extracts from Camera Lucida" (Wells, 2003). This key text of Photography, and the theory of it, studies the operator and the spectrum of the photograph. Barthes' motivation to examine the photography is the question of what is really photography or to be exact, is there an own spirit in the photography (Barthes 2003, 19).

There are at least three different viewpoints to find out from the photography, not to forget the various distributions: examples empirical (professionals / amateurs), rhetorical (landscapes / objects / portraits / nudes) and aesthetic (realism / pictorialism). And then there is the thought of death. The death is explained with the power to repeat, what does no longer exist after the action of pulling the trigger on camera. (Barthes 2003, 21.) There is no photography without someone and something and the question is, from all the objects in the world why these objects are chosen in this photograph (Barthes 2003, 20).

According to Barthes, photography has three different functions. These are to do, to undergo and to look. To do part is the *operator*, the photographer. To undergo is the spectatorship, the viewer, and the *spectator*. To look is same as seeing the object, what is photographed, the spectrum. Operator looks, limits, frames and decides the moment of death. (Barthes 2003, 21.) Or in other words, loan from Sturken and Cartwright, that the creation of image involves always some degree of subjective choice through selection, framing and personalization (Sturken & Cartwright 2009, 16).

Photography transforms subjects into objects (Barthes 2003, 23). Barthes describes how it feels to be photographed explaining the posing: the desire to be captured as an impression you want to give to the world. It is the transformation of the object photographed (well in the situations when object knows that there is a camera). (2003, 22.) This kind of transformation is one thing I'm looking from the images of female snowboarder.

When thinking about the elements and categories of the photo or photographing there is no escape of the unlimited possibilities to see, to understand and to read the message of the image or making the image. The photo is always pointing out something according the Barthes. How can we understand what is the point?

So the Barthes claims that, when someone understands the *studium* in the photography (explained as a taste of someone, the commitment for something, personal knowledge base and the personal experience and emotions, the things which interests us), this someone is on the way to meet the photographer: on the way to understand photographer's intensions. And when understanding the intensions, one is more likely capable to see the functions or the alibis of the photography. (Barthes 2003, 26.) These functions are to inform, to represent, to repeat, to surprise, to signify, to provoke, to desire with the photography (Barthes 2003, 26). And everything what is irritating or disturbing us in the photography, what makes no sense, is the *punctum*. Punctum is the maker that affects on me, or even changes me. (Barthes 2003,

25.) In the end Barthes is noting that the photography is not the absolute truth about the situation captured. The truth is coming from the spectator – from the audience seeing and reading the picture.

Marjorie Perloff enquires the truth also. According to her the photograph is not speaking the truth but cultural codes. She also shows that the photograph is given a feature to furnish the reality with the evidences. Perloff states also that “*what has occurred only once may recur again and again. Or it may not have occurred at all.*” Presumption is that photograph moves those viewers who understand the code or part of the code. For some viewers what has occurred once may never occur again. (Wells 2003, 35, 41.) Understanding the codes requires shared language and experiences.

Truth can be questioned also when considering the truth of digital images, digital photographs, which are easy to manipulate. It might be that we still trust in the “shared belief that photographs are objective or truthful records of events” (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 18) or could it be that we do not care anymore of the authenticity of the objects in the images as we know the truth is inimitable.

To summarize, this study focuses on the concept of digital photographs, using the term images of them. During the analyses of the images, the image is considered with the elements and rules presented by Barthes. The studium, the punctum (or missing it) and the functions are viewed when looking the images. In the analysis I will note the role of the operator, spectator and spectrum. I will also accept that the truth of the images is the myth of the photography. In the next paragraph my intention is to move into the interpretation of the representations defining the decoding of the images.

#### *4.4 Interpreting the representations*

In this paragraph, I will present the definition of representation, as it is one of the main questions in this study. I will also open the thoughts and theoretical background of interpreting the representations, the meanings. In the end of this paragraph, I will summarize the key concepts and concerns when interpreting the material of this research.

Visual culture research can't avoid the concept of representations. The representation is “*something which stands for or denotes another symbolically; an image, a symbol, a sign.*”

and it is “*a depiction or portrayal of a person or thing, typically one produced in an artistic medium; an image, a model, a picture*” (OED 4.4.2017). And when putting it more precisely, representation is “*an image, concept, or thought in the mind, esp. as representing an object or state of affairs in the world; spec. a mental image or idea regarded as an object of direct knowledge and as a means by which knowledge of objects in the world may indirectly be acquired (now chiefly hist.). Also: the formation or possession of images, concepts, or thoughts in the mind, esp. as representing, or as a means of acquiring knowledge of, objects or states of affairs in the world.*” (OED 4.4.2017). Following the concept of image, discussed in the previous paragraph, the image has a representational system. But without the spectator there is no representation. As it is described, representation is in the mind. Representation, as a term, comes from the cognitive psychology.

According to Sturken and Cartwright, people are trained to seek for cultural codes like the aspects of the image that signify for example sex, race, class, social status (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 27). These signifiers or codes change meanings in different contexts. Quite often, if not always, interpreting an image to understand what it signifies (consciously or not) people use the tools of semiotics to understand its meaning. According to Sturken and Cartwright, the father of the semiotics is known American logician and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also Swiss linguistic Ferdinand de Saussure in early 20<sup>th</sup> century has influenced on the semiotic way to interpret. Peirce believed that language and thoughts are processed by interpretation of the sign. Peirce claimed that the meaning is not situated in the object or in the representation of the object but in the interpretation of the perception. (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 28.) This means that “*every thought is a sign without meaning*” before we interpret it (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 28). Saussure’s theory has lead into the realization that meanings change due the context change. Barthes and other theorist from film studies have used this theory too. Saussure’s theory has been adapted especially in the interpretation of visual representational system. Not to forget Peirce’s influence in the analysis too.

In this point, the Barthes’ terms of denotative and connotative levels of producing meanings come important. Denotative meaning is the documentary like evidence found from the images. Connotative meaning again is more personal based on the culture and history of one’s own. (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 20.) The most objective way to analyze the photograph is to accept that there is just own experience and personal knowledge to help to read and understand the marks and signs captured in the photo. The presumption is: I can’t see the

whole picture as others do. We can share the universal, national, social codes but we will never share our memories that are guiding our understanding.

This model of Barthes with the two levels (denotation and connotation) has born from the thoughts of Saussure. In this model beside the denotation and connotation, there is also the sign, which is noted by the signifier. The signifier can be a word, a sound or image. And when the sign has the signifier it is signified which again means the concept evoked by the image. Additionally signifier means the image/sound/word and signified is the meaning. For Saussure, “*signifier is the entity that represents, and sign is the combination of the signifier and what it means*”. (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 29.)

How the sign is produced is dependable on the context where it is born, i.e. historical, cultural and social context. And the other context, effecting on the interpreting the meaning, is the place where the meaning is presented, the location where the sign, the meaning, the representation stops to be interpreted. In this place, in this location of the context, the spectator constitutes the opinion of the representation and starts to discourse about it.

The signs or representations can be divided in different types: iconic, indexical and symbolic, according to Peirce. Iconic signs are resembling their objects, i.e. veil = Muslim woman, uniform of soldier = army, snowboard = snowboarding, goggles = winter sports. Symbolic signs again have no straight relationship to the object. These symbols are i.e. cross = Christianity, symbols for the maker of car or logos. Indexical signs are pointing out straight to something. This something can be i.e. an object or action or note. It points out i.e. the symptoms of the disease or testifies the presence of something in the certain place in certain time. Also, some of the signs can present more than one type.

Stuart Hall notes that viewers decode meanings and the meanings are encoded before decoded. The viewer decodes, reads, the meaning positioned in one of the three different positions which are: 1) hegemonic position, 2) negotiated reading and 3) oppositional reading. Hegemonic position of the viewer interprets the dominant meanings or the preferred meanings. Negotiating readings negotiate with the dominant meanings making compromises between dominant and personal meanings. The third position challenges the dominant meanings by positioning the viewer opposite the meanings. (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 72-74.) (Hall 1993, 90-103.)

Interpretation in this research, of female snowboarding culture, is decoding the encoded meanings from the position of negotiating reading. My reading of the images fixes the



dominants and personal meanings. In this study it is also about finding the iconic, symbolic and indexical signs from the images and interpreting their meanings in the context of women snowboarding culture. The signs of the meanings, the representations, are conducted from the context where they are dissected. I will present the spectator, me, through the thesis, to place and justify my interpretations.

There could be few more concepts, like body and embodiment, sex and gender, to define when considering this research and the possible approaches of it. As time and the reasons of this study are limited I need to draw the line for the research and the important concepts of it. With these definitions of matters I will start the negotiation, the discourse, to find the hypothetical truth of culture of women snowboarders. In the next following chapters I will dig in to the research question and the material finally starting to analyze it and make some conclusions of it.

## 5 TOWARDS THE INTERPRETATION

The main approach in this study is to find out how the professional female snowboarders' images in Instagram - as a language of themselves, full on signs and symbols and meanings - are representing the female snowboarding culture and so creating and maintaining the values and way of life of women snowboarding. I will interpret these representational images as cultural and communal phenomena and examine how women snowboarders' images are connecting in the social and cultural environment we are living. Questions studied in this research are:

- What kind of photos professional female snowboarders are posting on their Instagram accounts?
- What kinds of women are in snowboarding culture?
- What do these photos tell about female snowboarding culture?
- Is there women snowboarding culture?

I will study and interpret these images under the concept of critical theory. Precisely I will use Mika Hannula's theory of critical theory as a tool for examining the visual culture of women snowboarders. This theory demands the sufficient context defining, locating the context for the discursion and finally through the discursion identifying the ideologies and identities presented in the data. Interpretation is seeking encoded meanings from the women snowboarding culture. My reading of the images fixes the dominant and personal meanings. In this study it is also about finding the iconic, symbolic and indexical signs from the images and interpreting their meanings in the context of women snowboarding culture. The signs of the meanings, the representations, are conducted from the context where it is dissected.

Assumption in this study is that, professional female snowboarding pictures taken by and chosen to be published to wide audience, and posted by the women snowboarders with the high up status in snowboarding culture, are representing the lifestyle of women snowboarding culture, community and individuals. These images are telling about the ideologies and values of the women snowboarding individuals but also about the whole community.

As Hänninen (2012, 110-113) pointed out in her study of snowboarding culture: the snowboarding culture has hierarchy. The elite of the snowboarders, usually the pro-ones, are deciding about the style of the individuals and so on the style of the community, and again

which way to develop the style. But it is still dependent of the one basic snowboarder and one's status inside the culture what is felt important, i.e. longing for freedom or feeling of community. The top one snowboarders are the icons who are deciding the style of the visual elements presented in the culture of snowboarding. But it is the majority, the no ones, who decide to follow them or not. (Hänninen 2012, 110-113.) What those ideals and values are, and how these are told is studied in my thesis paper.

This interpretation is part of the larger discussion and discursion. As Hannula quotes Stuart Hall: *"A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic"* (Hannula 2003, 21). Through the discourse, and this interpretation, the viewer (a.k.a. me) is able to understand the identity of own in relation to the context and location where the discourse is held. With this study I am also testing how much my ideology, my set of values in life, is reflected from the images of these four women.

I have presented the research questions and the approach to the analysis above. In the following I will open the material of the analysis and tell about the process of choosing the images and the user accounts of Instagram in this study. I will also tell about the process of organizing the material. The material opening takes in some analysis also as it is, telling how I see the images and the user accounts. In the chapter six the actual analysis starts.

### *5.1 Material*

The material is consisting from all together 54 pictures. These pictures have been chosen randomly from four Instagram accounts of four female snowboarders (Rukajärvi, Clark, Anderson, Teter). The thought of choosing the photos was to collect various images presenting the lifestyle of "iconic" or "famous" snowboarding women. The choose of the women had again different criteria. I wanted them to be "pro-snowboarders", so I used following criteria: Olympia and X-games medalist, and they describe themselves professionals. Also they needed to have Instagram account and they were on my list of the Instagram accounts I followed. Behind the big choose of the images, was of course me as a viewer. I had already seen some of the photos by following these chosen women in social media so I had some kind of thought what kind of pictures there were in their Instagram accounts.

The choosing of the images was not that easy as I predicted. The images were telling different story I had imagined on my mind. I believed that I could just decide to use two pictures from each of these iconic women snowboarders, but it was difficult to choose which of the two pictures would be in the study. Also it felt that by choosing only two photos and presenting them in the research paper as an only research data would be distorting the interpretation and so on, distorting the result of the research.

To assure the rightful and credible interpretation and the results of the interpretation I decided to use all the 54 photos as a material in the interpretation. But to make the interpretation and the material more understandable I started to categorize the photos in different themes. These themes were found while looking all the pictures together by concentrating on the actions, people and places the photos were presenting. There were several themes found from the photos and quite many of the photos were presenting many different themes. Another interesting part is that the themes are in my sense linking to each other, making sense of the world of quite similar activities.

Photos were print screen captured and then cropped to show only the Instagram view, not the other view outside the Instagram interleaf (Figure 1. & 2.). I know this could be considered as misrepresenting the material, but as normally the images are viewed through the mobile phone application it felt already not normal to view the photos by computer screen. However, the computer screen played important role to enable bigger screen to view strictly or exactly the images. And that's why the print screen was made from the computer screen not from the mobile phone screen.

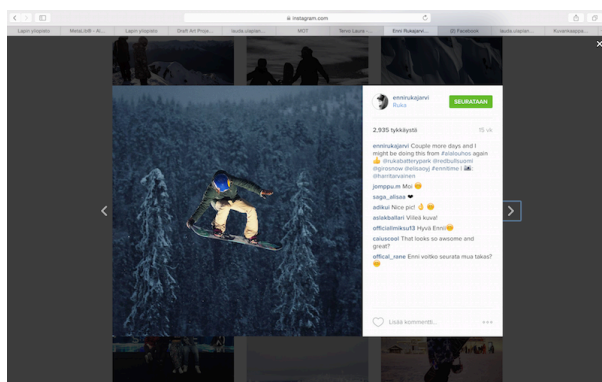


Figure 1. *Print screen captured*

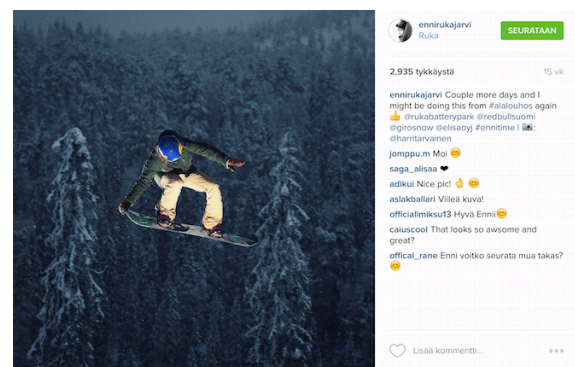


Figure 2. *Cropped print screen image*

I found out, it is not easy to study these images, just for the reason they are presented by some snowboarder. I felt the need to view all the images together under the different themes. The personas and the names of the iconic women snowboarders turnout not to be relevant at this point of the choosing process of the material. More like the personas behind the social media accounts were the first boundaries for the image choosing, when I started to collect the data to be studied.

But to interpret the images I wanted to avoid the assumptions or the public knowledge about the women that could shape the interpretation. More like I wanted this study and interpretation to focus only in the information the images were giving. However, to understand more about the material and the place where the images are originally shown I want to describe each of the snowboarder's accounts; description of themselves, amount of the followers and to be followed, how many photos they have published there and what kind of different hashtags they are using in the photo.

## *5.2 Snowboarders and their Instagram accounts*

The criteria I have used when choosing these four women were: Olympia medalist, X-games medalist, they describe themselves professionals, they have Instagram account and they were on my list of the Instagram accounts I followed. The pictures are collected on 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2016. Before I actually present the pictures and the chosen themes I will present the women and their Instagram accounts behind the material. The information about the women has been collected from their Instagram user accounts.

Enni Rukajärvi is a Finnish snowboarder and she has won Olympia silver medal, X-games gold medal and she is a World Champion. She uses word "snowboarding" and "nature" in her Instagram description. 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2016 Enni Rukajärvi had 26 thousand followers and she had 282 published pictures in her account (Figure 3.). In her pictures she uses mostly following hashtags: #redbull, #ennitime, #ennitimepow, #antaasiivet, #girosnow, #ruka and adds into image description Instagram accounts from @redbullsuomi, @rukaskiresort, @rukabatterypark and @elisaoyj. She mentions if the photographer is someone else and some of the pictures are taken by Harri Tarvainen and Matti Ollila. Rukajärvi's account mainly consists of photos of snowboarding and snowboarding places and nature and scenery. In the first 54 images collection there were 11 photos chosen from Rukajärvi's account. In January

2017, Enni Rukajärvi ended her sponsorship to Redbull regarding to her own values towards the sugar full energy drinks (Ilta-Sanomat 15.1.2017).

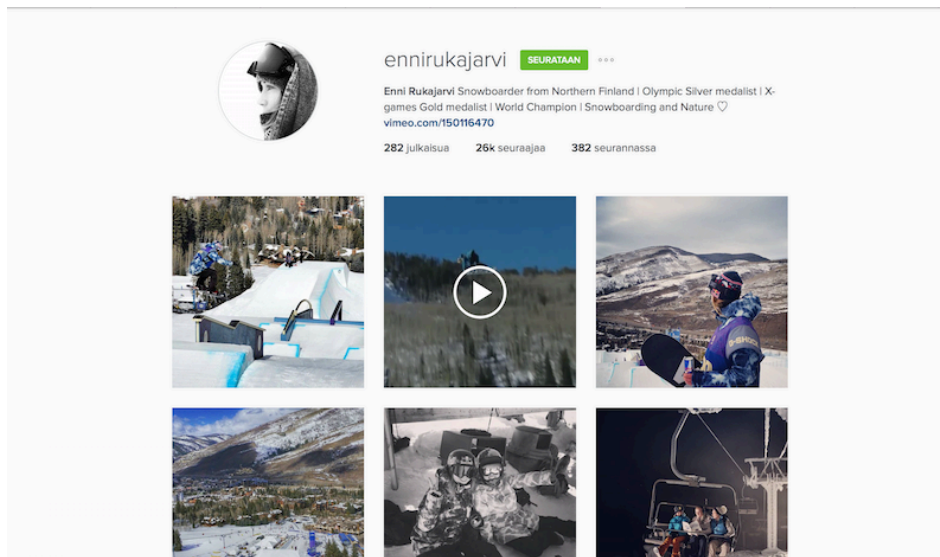


Figure 3. Enni Rukajärvi Instagram profile 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2016.

One of the most known female snowboarder is Kelly Clark from United States. She has won two times Olympic gold medals and two times Olympic bronze medals. She has founded the Kelly Clark Foundation that helps youth achieve success through snowboarding. She informs in her Instagram account that she is “lover of coffee, God and good times”. On 9<sup>th</sup> of March she had over 55 thousand followers and she had published 900 photos in her Instagram account (Figure 4.). In her images, the only repeating actor was @ioncamera and place Mammoth Lake. From Kelly Clark there are six images to be studied. Overall her account presented lots of images about snowboarding, competitions and other sports.

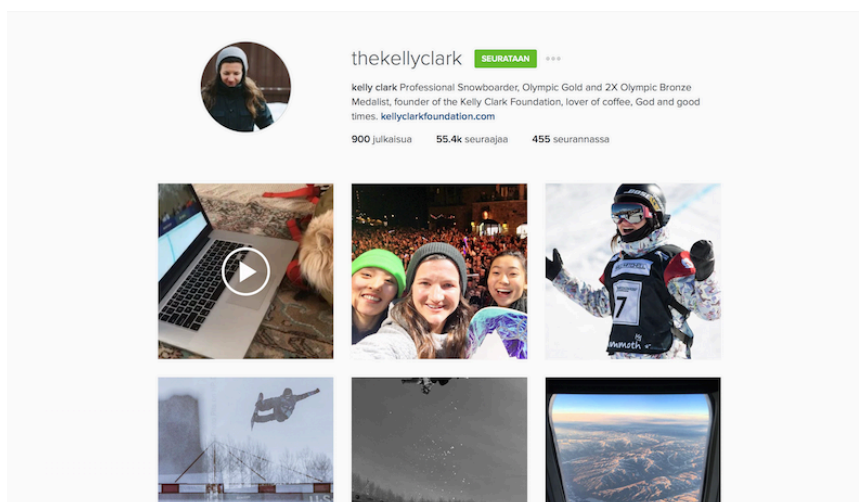


Figure 4. Kelly Clark Instagram profile 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2016.

Jamie Anderson is the most followed snowboarder in Instagram between these four women. Her description goes “*I like to explore...*” She is an Olympic champion and she has won X-games gold. Anderson has 354 thousand followers and she had 1251 publications on her account on 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2016. The most used hashtags were #liveyours, #goprogril, #jamieloubear, #goprosnow, #grateful and the most often repeating accounts in her photo descriptions are @gopro and @tylernicholson. She also uses Lake Tahoe place marking commonly in her posts. From Jamie Anderson images there were chosen together 14 images. In her account you get the outlook of the spiritual and yoga loving snowboarder.

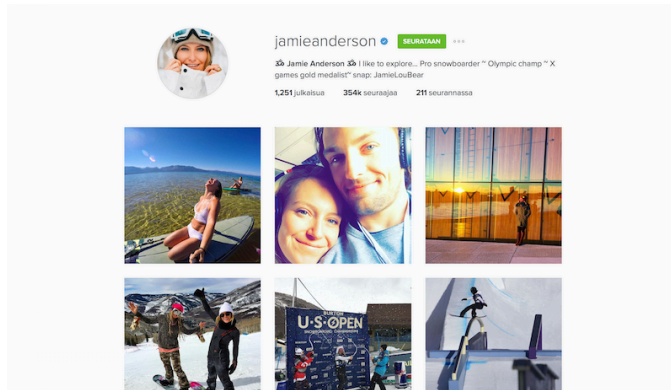


Figure 5. *Jamie Anderson Instagram profile 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2016.*

Hannah Teter is one of the most famous American female snowboarder. On her Instagram account there is 220 thousand followers and she had published 799 pictures by 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2016. She describes herself in her account “Olympic Gold & Silver Medalist Snowboard Halfpipe \* Three-time Olympian \* Seven-time XGames Medalist”. From Teter I have picked 24 images. The hashtags repeating in her publications are #mammoths, #backyard, #ShoutLakeTahoe, #LakeTahoe, #letitsnow, #getfit, #hero4sessio. Teter mentioned commonly Instagram users @gopro, @realjohnnybananas and @jamieanderson on her publications.

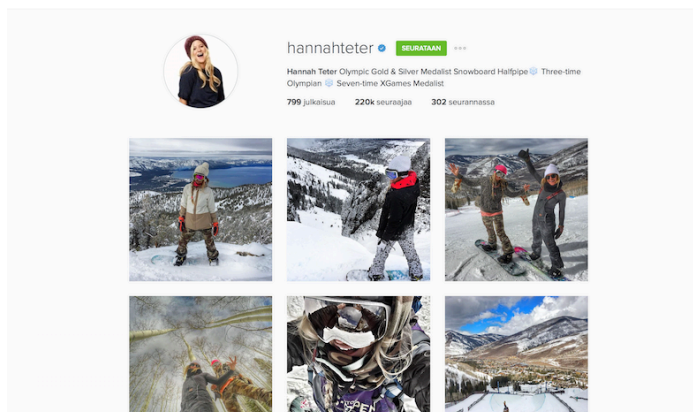


Figure 6. *Hannah Teter Instagram profile 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2016.*

### *5.3 Choosing the images and framing the themes of the images*

I have started to view different images in Instagram in January 2013. Or that was the time when I posted my first image in my Instagram profile. I can't remember when I started to follow the women (whose images are studied in this research) and their photos but I presume that it has been in 2013-2014. Motivation to follow their life through the Instagram was the personal interest in snowboarding, which still is there, and the personal interest to the global trends of snowboarding and especially female snowboarding. In some scale, I also wanted to evaluate myself, comparing my style and skills to the seen from these women. Obviously, coming to the conclusion that they are way better and more "snowboardish" than the author of this study. But as I felt myself quite lonely, as a woman snowboarder in the Finnish skiing-center full of freeskiers, in the place where I lived (and still live), and I didn't find the "crew" of mine, with viewing these images I felt I could be part of the global women snowboarding crew virtually and in my imaginary.

So when the time came to make decision of the subject of my master thesis, it felt naturally to continue my viewing and interpretation of these snowboarding women's images. I already had some kind of thought what the images were: what the images were presenting, different reasons for posting them and meanings the photos were including inside them. But what revealed to me during the process was that my first impression was not real. I felt: there is always something lying more deeper and I wanted to challenge my knowledge and myself and understand the snowboarding culture in the new perspective. This new perspective I wanted to be more neutral and I wanted to find the "truth" under my presumptions. So I started to plan my thesis considering in to snowboarding images in social media.

Later I delimited the study to consider the female photos and the four women presented above. Collecting the photos happened during one day, 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2016. I didn't have any plan what photos I would choose. Idea was to collect as many interesting photos as possible. And the first criteria was literally interesting photo for me. Why they needed to interest me is hard to explain, but it is something what comes to the connection of me as reader to the photos and the knowledge and background of mine to the context of the images. It is what Barthes called connotative meanings I found from the images. I mean, I had already some kind of knowledge about the images and the snowboarding culture, so I had these criteria already in my mind making the pre-evaluating of the photos. This is the interpretation of the representations as proved by Saussure and others earlier.



Another main attention was to collect, from all four women, same kind of images i.e. photos presenting snowboarding, winter, nature, other sport activities, other freetime activities, photos with other persons included and photos presenting their bodies (this, because there is always the question of representation of the female body what comes to the power of the gaze and women in visual culture). So the first collection of the images for analysis was chosen by the interest and the found variety of the same kind of representations in the images.

The presumption of mine was that there is going to be photos presenting, of course, snowboarding; places for snowboarding, snowboarding tricks, snowboarding equipment, sponsors and snowboarding competitions. I also thought there are pictures presenting the “other life” of these women. By the “other life” I mean the other hobbies and things besides the snowboarding. It came out quite quickly that the “other life” is still same as snowboarding life. The other hobbies found from the pictures are supporting their main activity, snowboarding. I was also waiting to find pictures presenting the other people in these snowboarders’ lives: family, friends, partners and other snowboarders. But actually there were not so many pictures of family and only few ones had photos from friends and boyfriends. The one thing I was sure about to found was a lot of images about snow, winter and nature. The problem of choosing these images was the huge amount of same kinds of pictures.

I collected all together 54 images. (Table 1.) From Enni Rukajärvi together 11 photos presenting winter, snow, scenery, snowboarding (tricks, places of performances), nature and nature activities, herself in the big world surrounding her, chilling and doing physical training in the indoor activity hall. Rukajärvi was more focused on presenting the snowboarding and the tricks in her images, so it was difficult to choose photos from her account. This lesser amount of photos presenting “other life” tells for me that Rukajärvi is selective about the images she is posting and she is using her Instagram account to give a certain kind of impression of herself compared to the matter that I assume she could present the “real” and “authentic” Rukajärvi with lot of different people and happenings in her life. This might be also because of the reasons what comes to the sponsorships; there are expectations from the sponsors to see the professional and hardcore athlete in Instagram too.

Hannah Teters’ photos were by number the most and from her images there was a lot to choose, all together 24 photos. In her photos there were similarity between the photos quite a lot. With these same kind of photos with different poses I mean her backyard photos where she is presenting herself quite undressed surrounded by dumped snow. In Teters’ photos there were also lot of different themes: goofing around, spending time with friends and boyfriend,

adventures in the nature, beautiful scenery, body (undressed), backyard, snow/dump, sun, exercising in the nature, yoga, physical training, water, alone in the nature, sub, sub-yoga, wakeboarding, skateboarding, slacklining, and alone by the beach. Her images were totally opposite to Rukajärvi. It seemed she really is living versatile life with a lot of stuff happening all the time. Her images showed to me more natural by mean she was showing a lot of other life besides the snowboarding too. Even though the images were presenting too glorious life and too much nakedness for my taste.

In opposite to Teter was Kelly Clark, as her images chosen to the study presented more activities she was doing without her giving a face to herself in the photos. There were small amount photos presenting her life outside the snowboarding and competing in snowboarding. She could be compared to Rukajärvi as they both want to represent themselves as professional snowboarders only, in the Instagram profile. With this I mean there is no other life much to see in the photos (even we know they have the life outside the snowboarding too, like eating and sleeping). From all the women in this study, Kelly Clark is for my eye most masculine woman of they all, following Rukajärvi who could be seen as masculine woman too. From Clarks' images I chose six photos to be part of this research. In her photos there were themes like no face photos, urban places, nature scenery, wild nature, winter, hiking, watersport, wakeboarding and sub-boarding.

The queen of women snowboarders in Instagram seemed to be Jamie Anderson. Even I have only selected 13 photos from her images there were more themes and varieties in her photos than others. Her photos were quite similar themed as Hannah Teter: camping, sub, friends, having fun, slashing the snow, yoga, water, snow/dump, spending time with boyfriend, nature experiences, scenery, woods, wandering in the woods, body (undressed but athletic), partying and alone by the beach. Jamie Anderson also presented her body undressed in her images but for my eye it seemed more athletic presentations than playing with nakedness.

After the collection of the 54 photos, I sorted out the pictures in five different categories (Figure 7.). I summarized all the themes named above in five categories of images:

- 1. Having fun and friends**
- 2. Sport activities**
- 3. Snowboarding and snowboarding places**
- 4. Nature and scenery**
- 5. Winter**

One image can be found under the several themes. Under these categories the photos are interpreted as a part of the larger combination of images representing the phenomenon of women snowboarding.

Table 1. *Photos of the women snowboarder with the different themes appearing in the photos.*

Snowboarder	Enni Rukajärvi	Hannah Teter	Kelly Clark	Jamie Anderson	
Number of the images	11	24	6	13	54
Themes in the photos	Winter, scenery, snowboarding, nature activities, oneself in the surrounded by big world, chilling, physical training	Playing/goofing around, spending time with friends and boyfriend, adventures in the nature, beautiful scenery, body (undressed), backyard, snow/dump, sun, exercising in the nature, yoga, physical training, water, alone in the nature, sub, subyoga, wakeboarding, skateboarding, slacklining, alone by the beach	No face, urban places, nature scenery (wild), winter, hiking, water sport / wakeboarding, sub-boarding	Camping, sub, friends, having fun, slashing the snow, yoga, water, snow/dump, nature, spending time with boyfriend, nature experiences, scenery, woods, wandering in the woods, body (undressed but athletic), partying, alone by the beach	

I noticed that when viewing the photos chosen in this study, I had left lots of images outside the research. This notice points out well, how the individual imaginary of mine about the relevant images was not reliable. I should have had more strict criteria for the choosing process in the beginning. For the defense of mine and of this lack of informative images, there also must be the understanding of the process of the interpretation. The photos were first chosen without any thought of the categories, the photos were divided later. And as the presumption was to focus on the “other life”, the snowboarding images were on minority in the material. This notion also tells about how the research process is developing during the process.

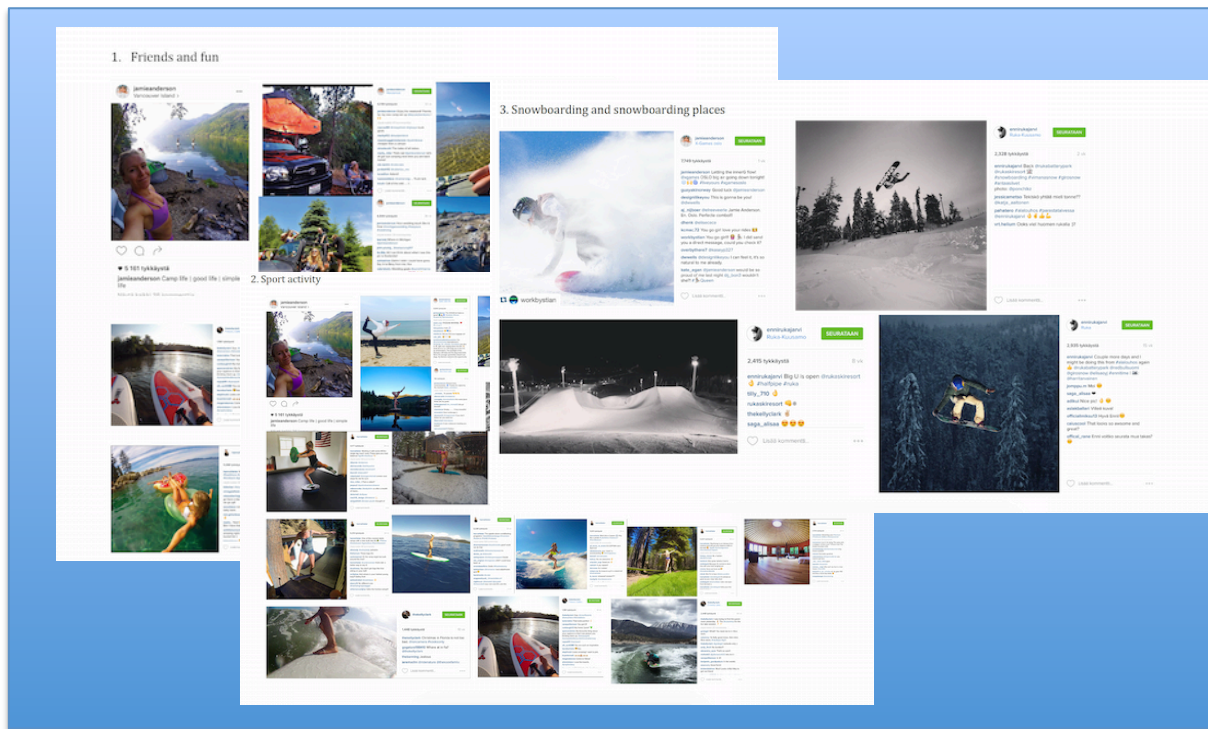


Figure 7. Example of the photos categorized.

Underneath the material and the images are opened for the more deep analysis. The last table (Table 2.) is presenting and summarizing the categories that under the images are interpreted in the next chapter. The names of the activities under the themes were little bit changing deeper I got when reading the images. My mind understood more and more, when I concentrated on what I was really seeing. At the same time I found more describing words on the actions and themes happening in the photos. I want to notice this now, as the material sorting and describing is also part of the analysis and the knowledge base of mine when interpreting is growing and even changing during the viewing process. In the next chapter the interpretation of the images is continuing from the description to understanding the images.

Categories	1. friends and fun	2. sport activities	3. snowboarding, snowboarding places	4. nature and scenery	5. winter
Number of photos	9	18	4	15	11
Themes	Camping, outdoor activities, laughing, watersport, sub-surfing, cruising together, longboarding, hanging on/in the water, sunshine, sun bathing, nakedness	Sub-surfing, yoga, sub-yoga, physical training, acrobatics, skateboarding, wakeboarding, surfboarding, slacklining, nakedness	Slashing the snow, flying in the air, tricks in the air, halfpipe	Camping, lakes, wild scenery, wilderness, one alone in wilderness, sharing a view with companion, mountains, nakedness, hanging with boyfriend /friend	Snow, embracing the snow, dump of snow, calm and silent scenery, various sunlights, leaving marks on the snow, nakedness

Table 2. Categories and themes.

## 6 ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will interpret and describe the images in the five categories. The following chapters are divided by these categories. After the interpretation and description I will summarize the main findings, the representations and images, of the snowboarding women.

The five categories are:

1. Friends and fun
2. Sport activities
3. Snowboarding and snowboarding places
4. Nature and scenery
5. Winter

### 6.1 Friends and fun

The themes under the friends and fun category were camping, outdoor activities, laughing, watersport, sub-boarding, cruising together, long-boarding, hanging on/in the water, sunshine, sunbathing and nakedness. These themes tell already a lot about women snowboarding free time activities. But how these actually differentiate from the other, not- snowboarders free time activities? Maybe it is the repeating signs in the photos that are pointing on that this is the women's way of life in snowboarding culture. Even more, when there is the need to post these photos into the social media channel Instagram, where millions of users can see them and is affected by them, these activities have meanings to them.

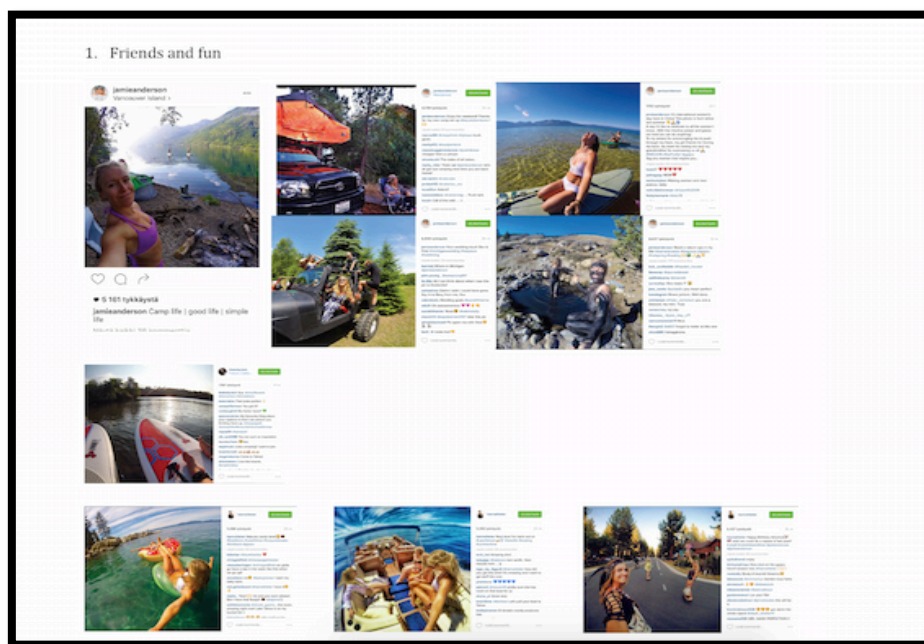


Figure 8. *The collection of friends and fun images.*

In one of the selfie photos of Anderson she is wearing the sporty purple bikinis on the beach. There is a camp with tent, fireplace, camping chairs and camping kettle. Behind her, there is a calm lake, maybe morning sun rising, and behind the lake, mountains quite close. Two persons are on the sub-board. On second view you can notice they are wearing long shorts, which makes me. She smiles, maybe she is a bit sleepy, or just woken up. She is one of the guys on a camping trip to wild nature. Or it seems there is no one else there.

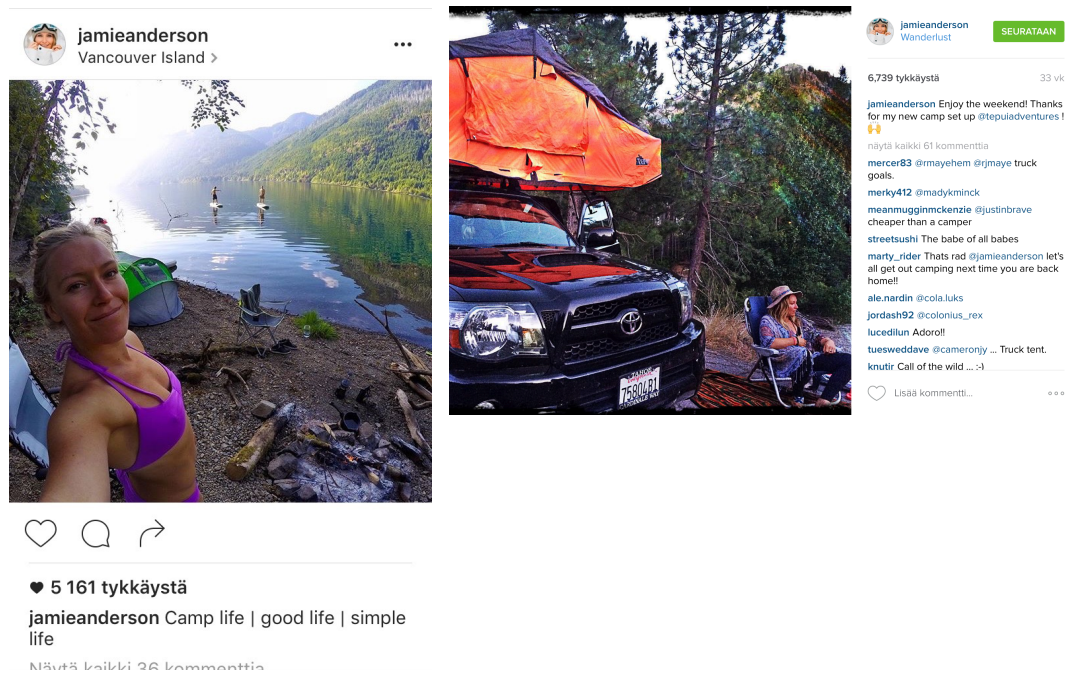


Figure 9. Anderson camping images.

In another photo Anderson is camping again (Figure 9.). But now, in the photo, there is a big car. It is Toyota, regarding the car sign in front on the bumper. On top of the car there is a tent. It is a car-tent or a tent-car. She is sitting on a camping chair, maybe in the middle of the discussion with someone or some ones. The photo is not showing that. There is no much details about the environment in the picture but it seems they are somewhere in the woods. She is wearing a cool summer hat and has surrounded herself with a big scarf. The feeling what comes from the photo is peaceful. But the car in the middle of the photo seems not fitting in the image and the atmosphere of it. It is disturbing.

It seems that some of the photos has been taken, as there is a need for this kind of photo now. There is an intention behind the photo. If you have over 350 thousand followers in Instagram account, there are also companies who want to merchandise their products through your photos. Maybe the last picture was like it. Photo what just needed to be taken because the car and the tent, because of the tent-car. Even Anderson is not participating in the car in the



image, but she is still inside the frame giving a face for the user of the tent-car and she is behind the post of the photo.

Opposite in the earlier tent-car image there is another car image. This time Anderson is taking part in the image and the car seems to be again one key sign. The car is this time convertible Jeep. Anderson is sitting on the driver seat but the car is not running. She is holding a drink in her hand and having a big smile. There are other people also in the photo. There is a girl and a boy and one whose gender is not recognizable. They are all laughing. The girls are wearing dresses. The outfits are making me think they are in a celebration of the wedding or maybe anniversary. The clothes are more hippies than fancy or expensive. Also behind the scene there seem to be kids wearing white shirts and straight black trousers. Kids are dressed festive way. It makes me wonder, why this photo is posted. What Anderson wants to tell with this image? Is it just spontaneous post telling about her personal life?



*Figure 10. Anderson and another car*

In the friends and fun theme there are also photos where the women are on the lake on a hot summer day. They are sub-boarding, laughing out loud and using selfie-stick to take a picture of themselves. The water does not look deep. You can even see the lakebed. Anderson is looking very athletic in her bikinis, which in this occasion are not too sporty, more like they are sexy. In the background there is the mountains again.

Similar photo can be seen in Clarks' gallery; there is lake and two sub-boards, sunlight and peaceful and relax atmosphere. Only difference is that there is only foots in the picture with a paddle. Clark does not show naked bodies or other people from her personal life. Maybe she has something or someone to hide. Or maybe she is keeping a strict line between her personal and professional life.



Figure 11. Anderson and Clark sub-boarding.

The nakedness is a sign repeating on the photos of Anderson and Teter. In the other way around, Clark and Rukajärvi do not show their bodies at all, or at least naked bodies. In one of the Andersons' photos, a woman is in a nature spa taking a muddy-bath. She and her friend are naked and all over covered on a black mud. They both are smiling in the sunshine and the environment surrounding them seems again wild. She is using the selfie-stick. There is a water bottle and the towels behind them, so it seems they are undressed somewhere else.

Teter has these kinds of photos also. In one of her photos she is on a swimming ring with her friend. Both have their own swimming rings. They are sunbathing and enjoying hot summer day by the lake. Photo is taken by the selfie-stick and they are wearing bikinis. And again there are the mountains behind the lake in the background. Mountains in these images are like waiting for the better snowy days to come. Or that these hot summer days are better spent on the lake but the mountains are waiting.

In another Teter's photo the group of girls (and one guy) is on a boat maybe in the middle of the lake. You can see from the photo that it is modified with some filter. Sun is shining and they are driving on a boat. It seems to be hot day and they are all wearing bikinis again. All girls have long blonde hair flying in the wind. And once again, there is, in the scenery the mountains.

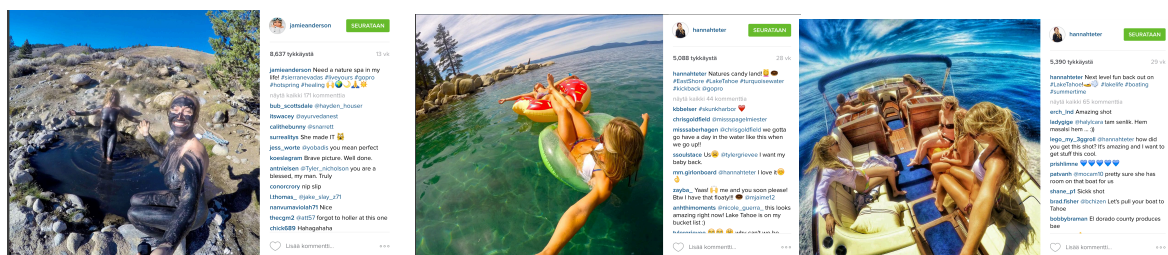


Figure 11. Bikini girls.



In one of the images posted by Teter there are few women skate- or long-boarding. Anderson takes the photo. The environment seems to be some kind of small town or village. Maybe it is somewhere in the mountains, as it looks like from the trees and the brown wooded house. It seems that in the photo Teter is waving the USA flag in her hands. They all are wearing shorts. They are boarding in the middle of the street and it seems a bit rebellious. Maybe there is a celebration of national day. And from this photo you can come to the conclusion that Anderson and Teter are friends spending free time together.

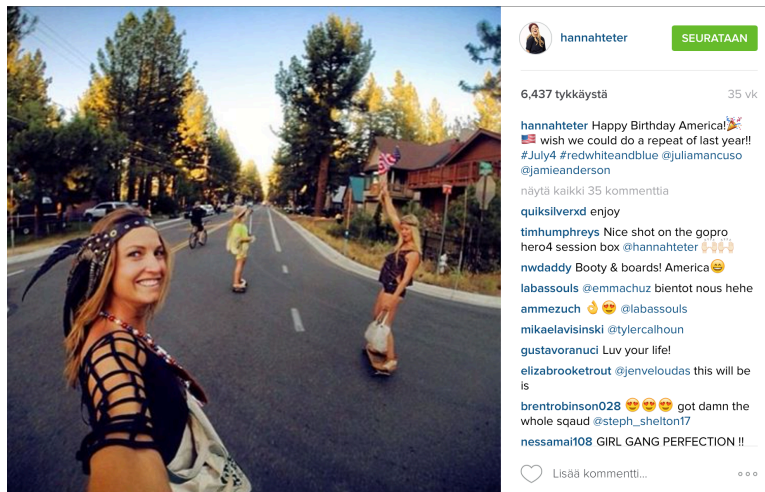


Figure 12. Girls boarding.

Friends and fun category shows that these women snowboarders are spending their summer time and free time by the water usually. Mountains, and the wild woods, are present and near. They are living close to the mountains and nature. They are enjoying their life in their home places close to nature and the mountains. The friends of them look alike and supposedly enjoy the same activities in life. The different kind of boarding culture (skateboard, long-board, wakeboard, sub-board) is part of their free time and time spending with their friends. They like outdoor-life like camping and enjoy the material enabling it.

Through these photos, the significant signs are: mountains, lake (or some other water element), selfie-stick (able the image making), nature, wild, sun, laughter and smile, healthy body figure. There are differences on the background of the cultures and nationalities of these women. USA snowboarders (Anderson, Teter, Clark) seem to be more open about their personal life than Finnish snowboarder (Rukajärvi). There is also found the differences between the work and free time, the intentional and spontaneous images, and how these are presented.

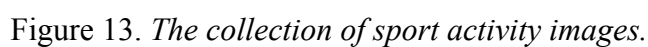
At the same time viewer can find that there are also photos that are taken “in the work time”. In work time the professional women snowboarder images are image making for the sponsors and merchandising different products and presenting the pro-snowboarder imago in the social media. This kind of image making is intentional and viewer can feel it through the images, i.e. the two different camping photos. In another image the atmosphere of the photo is more authentic and spontaneous. The person is present in the photo. In the second one the car is too much in the middle of the photo or in the middle of the frame, and the person is not present even she is seen in the photo. The situation shows that the photo has been taken to show the car and the tent as a part of their personal camping trip. But the person, in this second photo, is not interested to be present to show off the car. They are more like unconnected to each other.

This example above, also presents well the differences of personal and public, what is personal life showing in the photos and what they want to keep personal and in other hand, what it is what they want to show to the public. Like in the Clark’s photo, where you can’t say who else is in the photo and why the faces and bodies are left outside the frame. These are decisions of how to present their life in public.

Another similar difference is the intentional and spontaneous images. For some of the women the intentional and spontaneous images were shown hand in hand. There was a mix of intentional and spontaneous images in their galleries: you could see the professional snowboarders and the real personas behind the profession. For some, it seemed more natural only to show their professional side of life to the public. This means that there were no images that much showing the friends and fun stuff of their life. Maybe these, friends and fun, could be found also from their professional images, but for the research we would need more specific concentration and more photos for the interpretation.

The friends and fun category shows that female snowboarders love and respect nature and wild. They see beauty in the mountain silhouette, lakes and sunlight. Joy of the life is coming from the friends and activities done together in the wild nature. For them it is important to have healthy and trained body, and to show it to the public. These women are masters on making images and using the social media in the imago making process. To also control the imago of the female pro-snowboarders. But there are differences. Some of them are showing “everything” and some of them show only what they have to show. They post photos to participate and to maintain their status in pro-snowboarding, leaving the personal life outside

In almost every photo, of all the categories, sport is presented in some way. It maybe the sport in action, but it is also seen i.e. in clothing and in athletic body. In the selection of these photos I tried to find sport activities outside the snowboarding. I also viewed the muscle work in this category: in somehow these photos contained muscle and bodywork. All the four women had sport themed photos in their Instagram accounts. Actually the whole study could have been done under sport term. However, in this category my interpretation is not focusing precisely in single photos (some of the photos are viewed more intense) but more on describing them together.



The themes appeared on this category were: sub-boarding, yoga, sub-yoga, physical training, acrobatics, skateboarding, wake-boarding, surf-boarding, slacklining and nakedness. In the sport photos, selected in this study, the main thing seemed to be the body of the women. What they can do with their bodies and how does it look when they are doing sports. Another main element is a board: snowboard, sub-board, wake-board and skateboard. The main action of bodywork is yoga and physical training i.e. in the gym. The photos tell that these women are doing a lot of balance training, body controlling, upside down exercises and strength workouts. There were many photos where the woman was carrying her body in upside down position, like it is quite many times when they are snowboarding.

The environments for the sport activities and training were mostly performed in nature environments. This might be also that, the nature environments training looks to viewers more interesting and is standing out from the traditional fitness and gym images that Instagram is full of. Sport activities are connected on the theme of friends and having fun. The photos keep inside the same elements found from the first category; like mountain silhouettes and lakes. Only few photos were taken indoors.

Usually, in these photos, weather is sunny but there is one photo where the woman is training yoga (there is a yoga pose and yoga mat) in the front/backyard and there is little bit snow in the ground and more is snowing. This photo shows again how much they love snow and how they bear the coldness and snow even it is a cold element to experience. For them snow is natural and wanted form of nature.

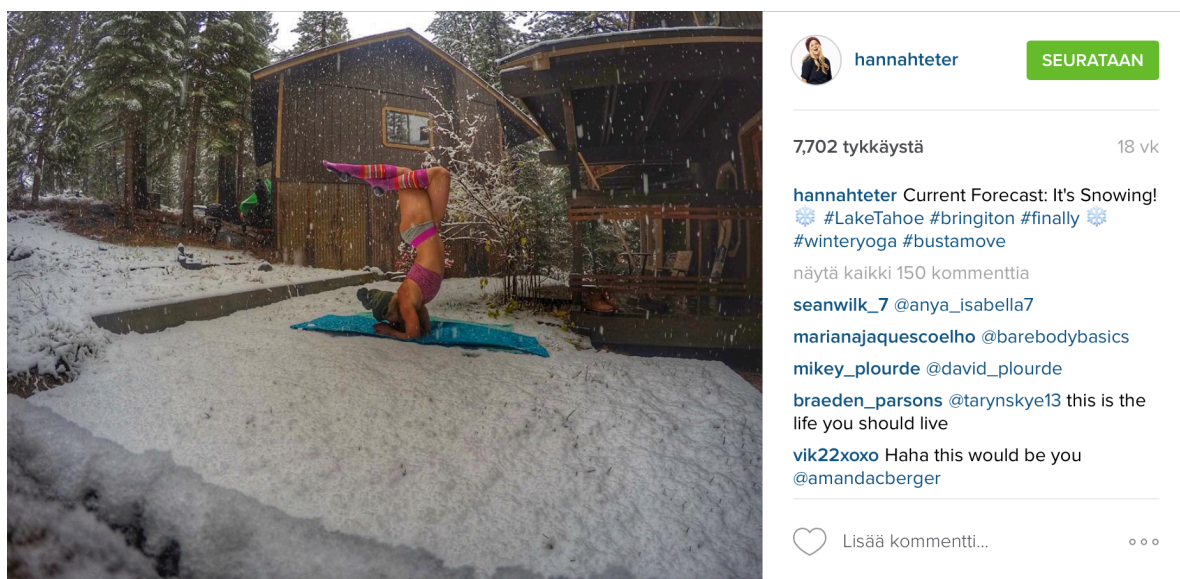


Figure 14. Yoga on the snow.



In the first category the USA flag occurred first time and only one time. Another USA flag was founded from the sport category, from the wall of the indoor gym. Actually it is the same woman, Teter, who is holding the USA flag in the first picture when skateboarding and now she is training in front of the flag. It is notable in the photo that there is a lot of space in the room, so the photo of this woman training with a weight and balance ball in front of the flag, feels intentional. It seems to me that this woman snowboarder is quite patriotic. The questions are: are the snowboarders in common patriotic and is it only in the USA or in global? And is it a special character of snowboarder or just in American culture? My opinion is that it is part of the American culture and with American snowboarders the patriotism shows out ones in a while. Also the patriotism is part of the snowboarding competitions and the natives come out with this kind of official signs like flags.



*Figure 15. Training in front of the USA flag.*

Most of the photos again came from Anderson and Teter to this category, but also Kelly Clark has sport photos in her Instagram account. Her photos are less concentrated on the body and more focused on the action. Clark is wearing wetsuit as in the same sport activity Teter is seen in small bikinis.

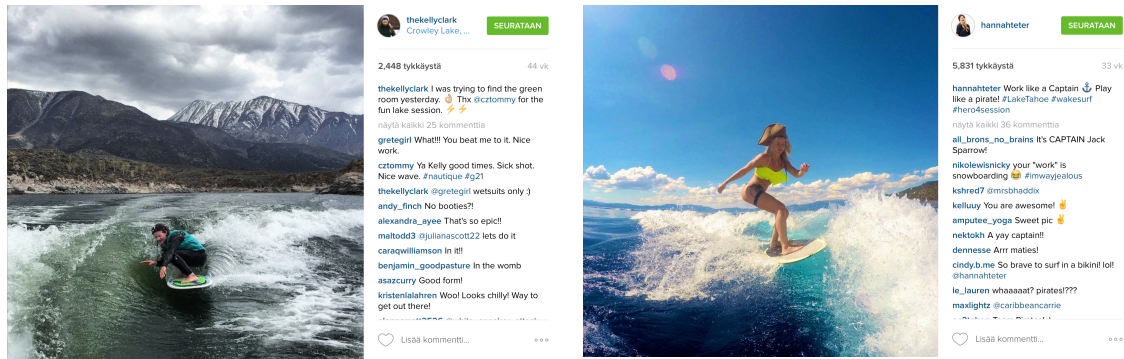


Figure 16. Wakeboarding.

The exception and different style in images present Rukajärvi. From her I found one photo where she is training, or maybe playing in indoor activity park. She is hand standing on the edge of the training spot for jumps. There is like a swimming pool but instead of the water, the pool is filled with foamed plastic. Rukajärvi is wearing the sporty black tights but the t-shirt is not sporty at all. Belly bottom can be seen from her photo and it is exceptional, as she is not showing her body in her photos in Instagram. This kind of difference of the appearances proves the different representations of women in snowboarding culture. Also it tells about the conflict of the women figure in general in snowboarding culture and women snowboarding culture.



Figure 17. In door training.

Through the sport photos women snowboarders can be seen creative, determined, strong and they have ability to concentrate, stand upside-down and they are well balanced. Training and workouts seem to be natural part of their lives and they favor training that can be done outdoors and is extreme and fun. Significant signs are: yoga poses, upside down poses, physical training in general, balance, athletic body, strength and nature environments. Differences are in dressing, to wear clothes or not, and in the attitude towards the sport as term and activity. With the attitude I mean, is sport felt by these women natural and okay activity in the light of the traditional training and the snowboarding culture history as an alternative for the traditional sport industry.

Other women, Anderson and Teter, wanted to show how often they are training and doing something outside the snowboarding and how they are strengthening their bodies various ways. This is concluded from the fact of how often they were posting the sport themed images in their accounts. Anderson and Teter I see more open for the traditional aspects of sports and training. The other two, Clark and Rukajärvi, were more clothe-conscious, and again felt no need to point out their body training. This difference can be seen also in the light of the snowboarding culture history. How the snowboarding history lies on the thought of an alternative to the traditional sport culture. So these four women are differentiating not only in how they are doing sports along the snowboarding but also how they want to show their relation to the workout tradition. As it might be, that in the general snowboarding culture, the taking care of oneself and showing it, is not seen as a value. That is also the reason why some of the pro-snowboarders are not presenting in public the traditional sport activities they are doing.

### *6.3 Snowboarding and snowboarding places*

Even it was decided that this study is not concentrating on snowboarding it was difficult not to include any snowboarding photos in the material. The focus on interpreting snowboarding images is not to evaluate the snowboarding, but see the images more like the extra information of the values and meanings in female snowboarding. Even there were a huge amount of snowboarding images in these women's profiles I only chose four images. Perhaps the decision to concentrate only in the "other life" of snowboarders directed my chose of images. Alongside the snowboarding in this category I'm also viewing the environments of snowboarding.

The themes in the snowboarding category were: slashing, flying in the air, tricks in the air and halfpipe. Most of the snowboarding photos of these women were images about women doing some kind of jumps and showing a snowboarding trick in the air. The interesting part of this kind of images is that there is more still poses on the photos than photos presenting the speed and snowboarding as a movement. This might tell about the interest of these women, how they are keen on doing tricks rather than riding aggressive on the slopes or outside the slopes. The stillness in the images was seen in the women standing on the board in front of the half-pipe or standing on the board middle of the woods.

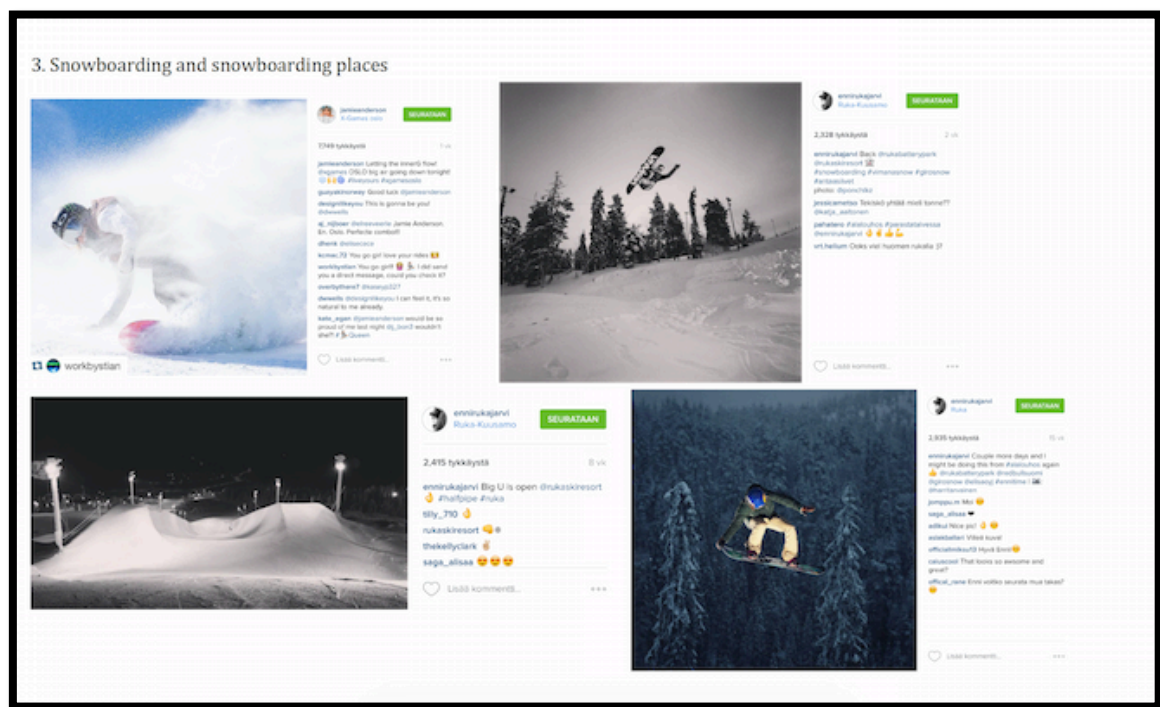


Figure 18. *The collection of snowboarding and snowboarding places.*

In the snowboarding and snowboarding places category, one of the main signs found from these photos is splashing or slashing the snow. In the collection of these photos there is one photo where Anderson is slashing the snow during the snowboarding. It is hard to tell anything about the snowboarder by the image, i.e. gender or outlook, except the snowboarder know how to ride hard. Only hint of a female gender is a pink base of a board.

Same kind of anonymous, or impersonal style, recur in other snowboarding photos. Without knowing these photos were from the Instagram account of these four women, it would be hard to tell is the rider woman or man. Also the clothing can be seen quite neutral or standard regarding the snowboarding culture where clothing is a bit masculine even there is also the girly patterns and colors in some of the clothes for female snowboarders. Like Hänninen noted in her study (2012) about the style of the snowboarders and how important it is to



snowboarders, in these photos I feel I should not touch or evaluate it, as I don't know about it. Nevertheless, my opinion is that these female pro-snowboarders are strict about what they wear and they are choosing their clothes to be part of the main masculine snowboarding culture. This is how they are more credible and pro.

Along the slashing the snow, the repeating sign is the tricks in the air. Photos presenting the snowboarding tricks are placing the snowboarder up in the sky almost flying. In one photo of Rukajärvi she is flying above the treetop and everything else is framed outside. There is a spotlight pointing on Rukajärvi and the trees and forest is under her, or shaping the background. In another photo of her again there is a snowboarding trick in the air and Rukajärvi is same time almost like waving to the photographer. Again the rider is very impersonal and actually it is hard to say where she came to the trick and where she is landing. There is no recognizable jumping obstacle in the photo and the photo is black and white colored.

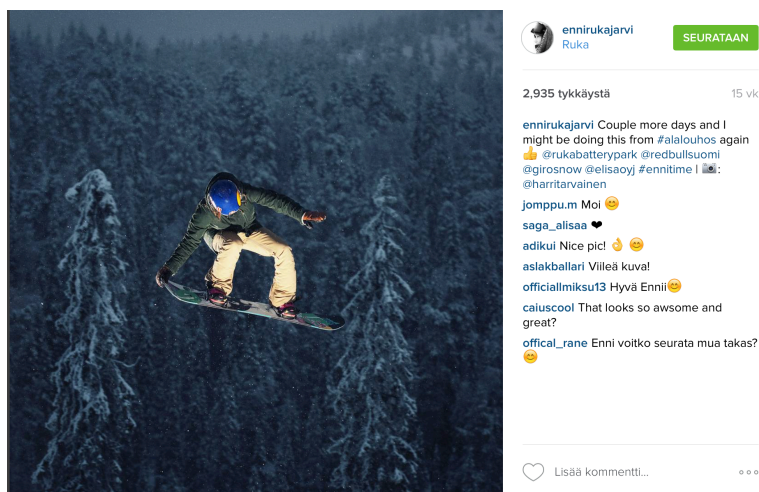


Figure 19. Enni Rukajärvi in the air.

Boxes for jumping are not the only places for the snowboarding performances alongside the mountains, slopes, parks and forests. Half-pipe was showed often in the photos outside the chosen material and there is one half-pipe photo part of the category of snowboarding. In this part of the interpretation I went to Instagram accounts again, to view quickly if they all ride half-pipe. With this quick view I noticed that three of the women were riding also half-pipe and one of the women was focusing only in the parks with rails and boxes, this is called slopestyle.

Women snowboarder seems to ride in the typical places for snowboarding according to the photos studied. The photos about snowboarding are not presenting the gender or body of female. The photos are presenting impersonal anonymous snowboarders. This again point out

### 6.4 Nature and scenery

4. Nature and scenery

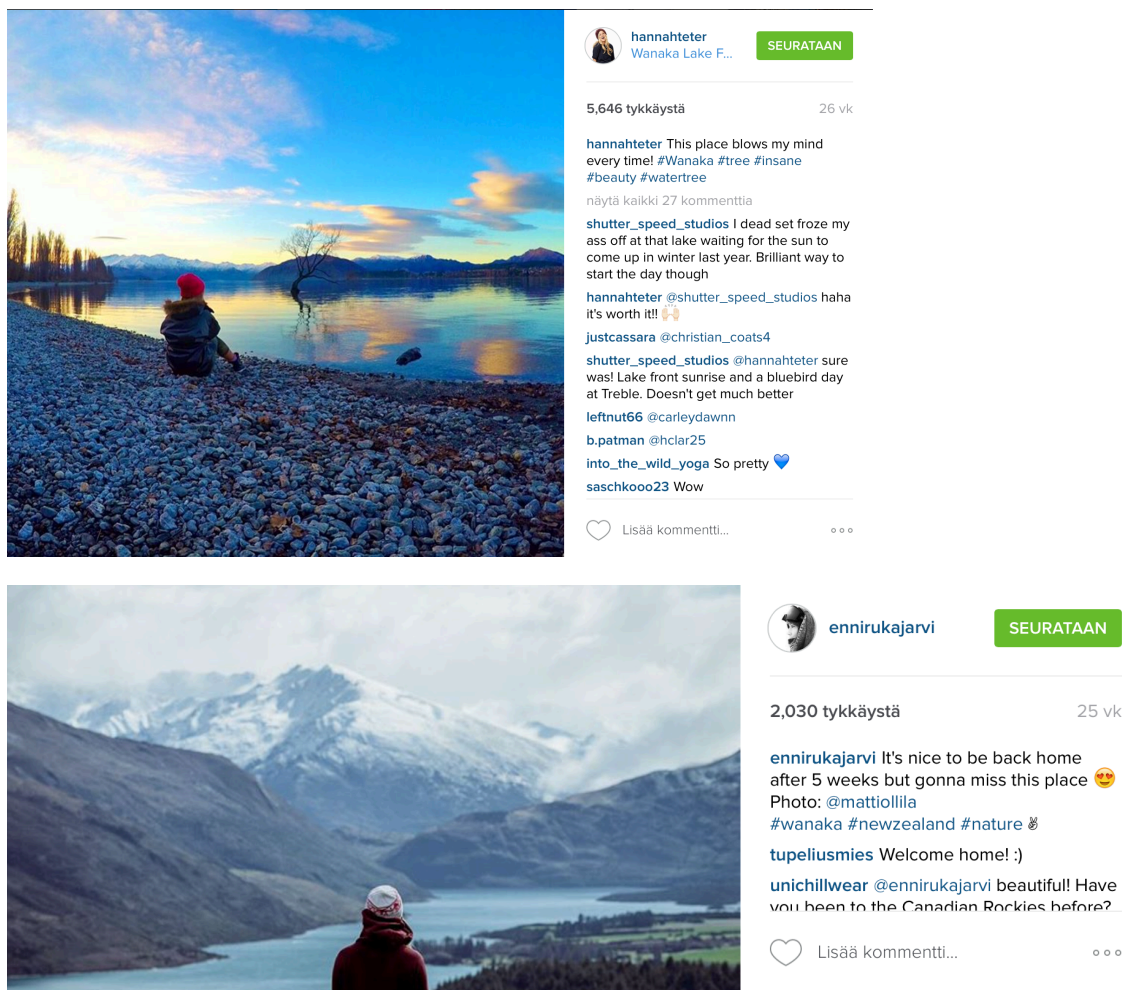
The collage displays a collection of social media posts, primarily from Instagram and Facebook, showcasing nature photography and outdoor experiences. The posts are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with each entry featuring a photograph and accompanying text.

Key elements of the posts include:

- Instagram Posts:** Several posts are visible, including one from 'jainianderson' (Camp life) with 5,161 likes, and another from 'jainianderson' (Camp life) with 1,000 likes. The captions often mention 'Camp life' and 'good life'.
- Facebook Posts:** There are also Facebook posts visible, including one from 'jainianderson' (Camp life) with 1,000 likes, and another from 'jainianderson' (Camp life) with 1,000 likes.
- Photography Themes:** The images predominantly feature natural landscapes: serene lakes reflecting mountains and forests, misty or snowy mountain peaks, dense evergreen forests, and people enjoying outdoor activities like hiking, fishing, and camping.
- Engagement:** The posts show various engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares, indicating their popularity.

Figure 20. The collection of nature and scenery photos.

The nature in the photos is wild and untouched. The elements of water, snow and mountains in the horizon are repeating on them. One notable thing is the nature light in the photos. Even when it is modified by filters. With the significance of nature light the scenery is looking beautiful and that unique short moment is captured in the photo. The magnificent moments and wonders of the world are underlined in the photos with the positioning of the women. In many photos the woman is in the middle of the frame alone or with a friend, quite small sized, and the photo is taken behind so that you can see the woman watching the amazing show of the nature in front of her.



*Figure 21. Woman standing alone watching mountains.*

For me it seems that nature is giving this wild playground for these women to challenge themselves in front of the big and uncontrolled wild. And these women are part of this wild nature. And they are respecting the possibilities nature, or the wild world, is giving to them. Nature is an adventure and these women are hunting for the adventures.

Again not all the women are posting these nature and scenery photos. As noted already earlier some of the women are positioning themselves in the pictures only in the performing places of professional snowboarding or showing them only in their professional images. This displays the truth of the social media galleries that the persons and profiles have their own intentions to show what they keep relevant to themselves and their making of imago through visual.

In the nature and scenery photos one interesting point is the different nationalities and cultural backgrounds and how these are seen through the images. The nature and scenery pleasing the Finnish eye is more bare and more dark, mountains are more distant and the photos are light and highlights more simple than the American sisters nature and scenery photos which have more sun, colors and water in their photos. In this point I will underline that the eye means the woman snowboarder's eye, as they have chosen the images in their social media gallery.

The significant signs in these photos are: mountains, bare and wild scenery, nature light and still positions in front of the wonders of the world. The differences can be seen if there is a person in the photo or if the photo have bare scenery image. Another difference is coming from the action in the photo or doing nothing in the image.

These nature and scenery photos are posted in Instagram to represent the snowboarding women's respect and love to the nature and natural world. As snowboarders, they are part of the nature and they have access to the wonders of the world from the unique spots where everyone has no easy access. These wonders of the world are stopping them in the time and place. These sceneries make them stand silent in front of them. It is like the nature and mountain scenery is the empowering scene for them. These photos contain dreams of snowboarding in the distant mountains and adventures with the closest friends. These images connect them to the other snowboarders in the whole snowboarding culture. These scenes are their dreaming scenes.

### 6.5 Winter

Winter as a category was a surprise for me, as winter is so close to the snowboarding category. But when viewing the photos it came out clear that winter played special meaning in these women's photos and life. The themes I found from the images in winter category were: snow, embracing the snow, dump of snow, calm and silent scenery, cold sun light, leaving marks on the snow and nakedness.

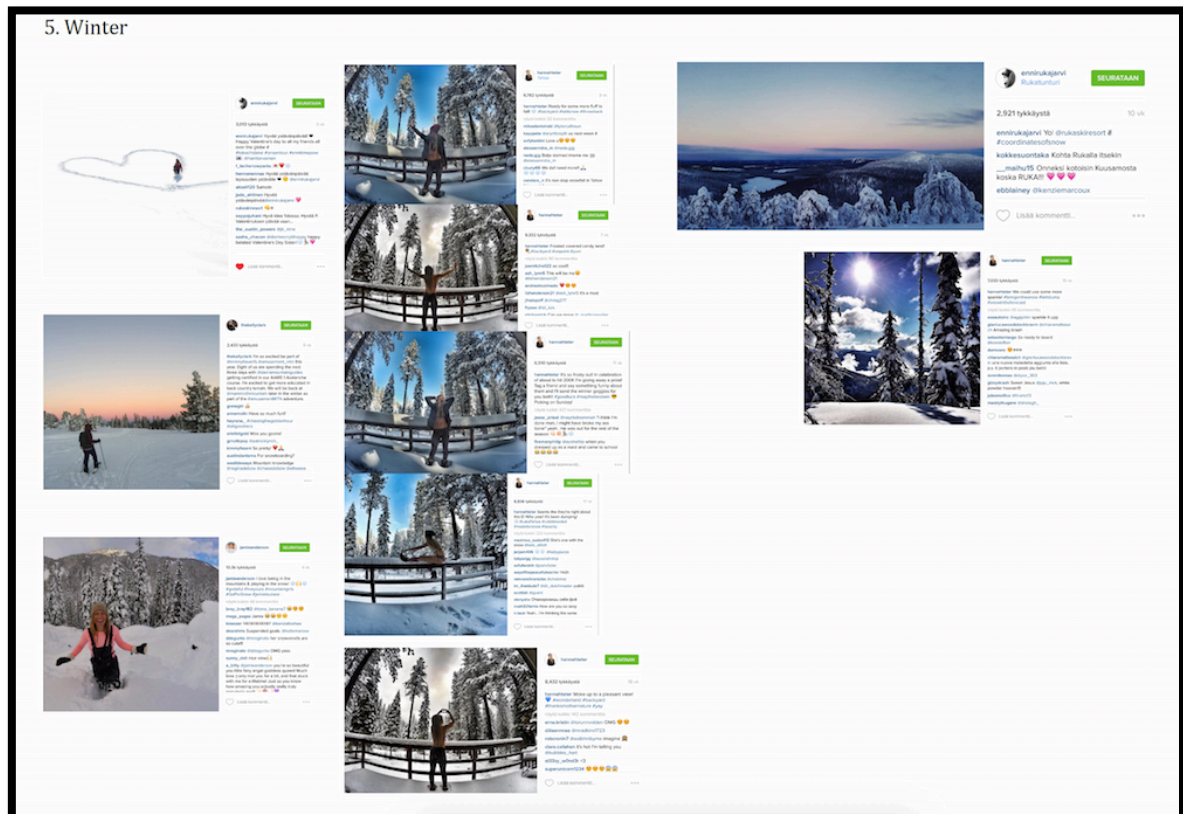


Figure 22. The collection of winter photos.

The most notable sign of winter in the photos was snow. All the winter photos contained snow. Snow was surrounding the persons in the photos, it was there to dive in and drown in. Snow was there for the play and to leave a mark. The women were smiling and embracing the snow. One of the women, Rukajärvi, was even drawing a big heart in the snow by fording in the snow.

One woman has repeating set of photos of her on her backyard terrace almost naked, or slightly dressed, loving the dump of snow. Maybe it is her morning routine to go to the terrace and amaze the snow and the possibilities the snow gives for the following day. As it is true, without snow there is no snowboarding.



Winter scenery looks cold and it is presenting winter forest above the treetop. And in the horizon there is the cold light of sun. So the viewer get the feeling of the following minutes when they are snowboarding down the mountain walls, there is a lot of snow and the air is fresh and cold.

Depending on the year time there was more and less images about winter in the Instagram accounts of these women but the winter photos were appearing around the year. This makes me think that they must travel hunting after the snow around the world.

Remarkable signs in the winter photos are: snow, mountains, marks on the snow, embrace of snow, snowy trees and smiling middle of the snow. The images are representing also the distance between the nature and people populated areas. In example, the peace and calm atmosphere away from the people build performing places. There rises the question of how much someone can love snow and is it exaggerated even? The difference is on the truth that snowboarders love snow and there is no other. Winter means everything to the snowboarder, and it feels useless to say, it is important particularly to the women snowboarders. It is everything to every snowboarder. Winter is needed and longed year time for a snowboarder.

#### *6.6 The representations of the women snowboarders*

In the context of this study, as an intention to describe and define female snowboarding culture, based on the interpretation above I will sum up the representations of women snowboarders. The interpretation has been executed with the critical view understanding whole time my own relationship (the background, history and personal experiences and knowledge) towards the subject, as required by Hannula. I have not tried to hide it, more likely I've tried to be as open as possible, about my own intentions in this research and in the interpretation. Not to forget the interpretation in the light of the background and history of snowboarding and previous studies. These are the key elements for performing a visual culture study, based on critical theory.

Remembering the Hannula's statements that, what matters in this kind of study is to understand the environment of the object studied. In this study the environment of the images is in the social media channel Instagram. In this case, Instagram must be seen as a tool to perform oneself inside and outside the snowboarding culture. And what comes to the interpretation of the images, Instagram is a tool to maintain the intentional and professional

image of a female snowboarder. With Instagram these women are maintaining the pro-status inside the snowboarding culture and showing appropriate lifestyle of pro-snowboarder to the outside of the culture.

When viewing this interpretation from the aspects of the visual culture of female snowboarders, with the critical theory presented in this research, I will locate the context of this study in the opinion that there is female snowboarding culture existing and with the image making in Instagram women snowboarding culture is maintained. Instagram images show that there are two types of female snowboarders' representations: *the feminine snowboarder* presenting the female snowboarding culture and *the neutral female snowboarder* maintaining the main masculine snowboarding culture. These two types of representation were also found in earlier studies of Thorpe.

So in the concept of Mika Hannula, I have defined the context of the study and located it in the opinion that there is female snowboarding culture existing. The third part of the theory is the discursion. The images of this study are the discursion of this study. The images are telling about female snowboarding and pro-female snowboarders. The images are discussing with each other and with the viewers. The interpretation point out that women snowboarders' life, and so on the female snowboarding culture, highlights: friends and having fun with them, sport as a lifestyle and important activity in their lives, snowboarding as a profession and impersonal gender-free image, love and respect of nature and passion for winter with the fundamental need for snow.

Fourth part of Hannula's critical theory concept is the identities. Identities of the snowboarding women are found out from the discourses and what they are telling. Snowboarder is an identity. What the snowboarder's identity is holding can be found through the discourses, through the images. By the analysis of the images I state that there are at least two recognizable main identities inside the snowboarding women society: the feminine snowboarder and the neutral female snowboarder. With this I mean, that this study has achieved to find out these two representations of the identities but when considering all the individuals, the identities are mixing, like mine too.

The differences between these two main identities are found out from the images. The differences in the images were i.e. in the representations of the body. Other images were more focused on showing the athletic and trained body, when again the other images were concentrated in the action, not to the body of doing. Also the difference could be seen when

viewing the action and how it appeared to the viewer. In example the sport activities: the feminine snowboarder had “girly” training methods like yoga and they were doing it in the small clothes presenting their body at the same time. The neutral female snowboarders were not showing their bodies and their training activities could be seen more guy like, i.e. wakeboarding with wetsuit on or inside playing arenas which could be seen more like having fun with no serious sport or training goals.

What comes to the body presentation, it is remarkable how these women know how they want to show their bodies to public. The feminine snowboarders are put in good use the concept of the gaze. They understand the possibility of it in manipulating the viewer. They have the power to order how feminine body is presented in the masculine snowboarding culture because, I believe, they are presenting their images to the other women, not to the men, as they have already achieved the credibility in the elite of the snowboarders, they are on the top of the hierarchy and they already have the credibility as a pro-snowboarder. They are no under the masculine power or in need to get more respect from the male snowboarders.

Healthy and trained looking body is not only seen as a sex object (even quite many see it so). I feel more these bodies are presented to show their personal control of their bodies and power of themselves, physical strength and the mental power. They are also representing the hard work they are doing for their profession, their confidence as a woman and their freedom to decide. They are presenting their way of life and how they are enjoying it. I am not denying that the body presentations could not be seen also from the side where the women are seeking for the approval of male gaze. But, like I claimed earlier, I believe these pro-female snowboarders, on the top of their cultural hierarchy, need no more approval from males. They need approval from the other women. How the neutral female snowboarder confronts the male gaze is more interesting as it seems to me, they are trying to fit in the imago of masculine snowboarder.

However, I believe the conflict between the other women is more in the image making of personal and professional snowboarding. As the snowboarding culture has involved the belief of the party culture not so healthy. The feminine snowboarders again represent the quite opposite lifestyle focusing on taking care of oneself but not forgetting the concept of having fun. Maybe they have made intentional decision not to show the party side of their life because of the existing prejudices and this kind of image fitting on the professional snowboarder imago.



The thought of what is showed and what is left outside of the image, is at the same time understanding the studium and punctum of the photos as Barthes has pointed. The feminine snowboarder is more open about her personal life than the neutral female snowboarder. The identity of feminine snowboarder: showing everything, spontaneously and intentional, feels for the viewer more authentic and reliable. Also they are more personas to identify with. Instead, the professional, neutral female snowboarders' images are more intentional (not to say the feminine snowboarders' images would not be), insecure, limiting, unreliable and more untouchable and distant. There are less signs to connect. There is not enough personality to rely into the representation. What is shown and seen modifies our understood of the matter and set our interest and identification. It is the power of the image.

Other differences between the feminine snowboarder and the neutral female snowboarder are in clothing (girly vs. neutral or even masculine) and in openness (as mentioned above) in the images (showing everything vs. showing only professional). What again was similar for these identities are found from the representations of snowboarding. In snowboarding these both identities want to show them self as a professional and the clothing, riding, tricks and being is neutral, not recognizable from the perspective of a gender. Also these both identities are using Instagram in meaning making and image maintaining. They both have the foundational values in the nature and dream of the mountains in the wild.

As I claimed in the beginning of this study, images in Instagram are the representations of the values of women snowboarding culture and these women are creating and maintaining the values, this study has proved it to be true. In addition, with the images they are maintaining their own status inside the snowboarding culture too. Moreover, images in Instagram are part of the Thorpe (2007) presented snowboarding culture hierarchies and Hänninen (2012) highlighted snowboarding elite. Thorpe claimed that the women access in the male dominant institution of competitive snowboarding, women are forced to adopt the hierarchies and aggressive values and competitive relationship. This is, according to Thorpe, the social ideology of snowboarding. And it is manifesting the need to get to the top, or to be seen as better than others. This kind of hierarchy is destroying the community that existed among the women snowboarders. (Thorpe 2007, 92.)

I would like to add and claim that there is growing female hierarchy in the snowboarding culture. The social ideology of male dominant snowboarding culture is challenged by these female pro-snowboarders. Not all of them, the neutral female snowboarders, are behind the change or development of the culture. The attitude is dependable on the individual's

background and culture. But this founding supports Thorpe's claim that femininities in the snowboarding culture are diverse to those who challenge the maleness of snowboarding and those who are accepting or even supporting the male hegemony (2007, 83).

The images however present values that I found more soft and feminine than Hänninen and Thorpe underlines. They speak for the women valuation inside the culture coming from the style "ride like guys" and present yourself masculine inside the slopes and outside the slopes (Thorpe 2007, Hänninen 2012). Hänninen even claimed that women snowboarders' intention is to snowboard like men and be as good as men refer there is no women snowboarding culture (2012, 95). In the light of this study and the images interpreted here, I claim there is the growing women snowboarding culture with it's own values. These values can be seen in the representations of the women concentrating on the wellbeing and healthy, active and nature loving sporty lifestyle. These women differentiate from the guy like women snowboarders also with openness and presenting proudly the "girly" lifestyle full of yoga, bikinis, sunbathing, smile and laugh. Not to forget the original values of snowboarding culture: the friends, the mountains, nature and alternative, or the freedom as Hänninen state it (2012, 106-107). However, these feminine snowboarders are accepting the mainstream of the snowboarding culture as natural development of the culture.

Thorpe (2007, 94) called after the women to develop alternative models to be part of the snowboarding culture. I believe the identity of the feminine snowboarder is making the new order inside the snowboarding culture. The next step in the light of the research would be in finding out the other feminine snowboarders and the spectrum of identities participating in chancing the masculine snowboarding culture.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I will present the answers on the main questions of this research. I will also evaluate the process of this study and the credibility of the results. Finally I will sum up the following questions and thoughts about the further study possibilities.

### *7.1 There is female snowboarding culture existing*

This study has been, as a process, a personal learning trip in snowboarding culture, in female snowboarding culture and in visual culture study general. It has opened to me deeper concerns about culture and the meaning and role of it in our society and in individual's life. This study has made me think about the power of the culture to control persons, communities, societies and nations. Also my previous thoughts about culture as an empowering element and seriously needed actor in persons' life, has strengthened. Cultures have power to order us but also make us feel connected or outsiders, are part of others and express ourselves.

And when thinking about the earlier concerns about power by Kendall and Wickham (2001), that the mass-culture builds spaces and architectures to order the subcultures, this study has taken part in the discussion, proving that mass-cultures can dominate the subcultures. In this case, masculine snowboarding culture is dominating female snowboarding culture. And as Kendall and Wickham claimed, cultural studies as a study of order, agreeing with Tony (2001, 18-19), that "*these orders do not touch the 'others'*". The orders do not touch the ones outside the space and culture inside the space. I will claim that as long as women obey the rules of masculine snowboarding culture, the women snowboarding culture is the acquiescent subculture.

At the same time the concept of the otherness and the others is present through the study. The agenda of this study has been, in the sense, outsider missing inside the culture. This perspective has been highly present on the position of the researcher, me. It is me who wants to be a real snowboarder. And, I'm feeling outsider inside the snowboarding culture. It is about the power of those who are inside. In addition, the question is about women's culture and the power relations inside it. For example when considering the definition of a snowboarder (not to miss the question of who is defining the snowboarder: is it the researcher or the snowboarders themselves).

The questions presented in the beginning of the thesis have got their answers. For the first questions of what kind of photos professional female snowboarders are posting on their

Instagram accounts, I will sum up following: women snowboarders post in their Instagram accounts photos telling about their life as a professional snowboarder. This life contains lots of outdoors, nature loving and respect for nature, training and body work, boarding activities and having fun with friends in different forms of nature (lake, mountains, woods). In the second question about what kinds of women are in snowboarding culture, my answer is simple: there are at least two types of women in snowboarding culture. I will call them the feminine snowboarder and the neutral female snowboarder. They are differentiating from each other by their representations that are changing from the personal openness to the strict professional imago. Also their body presentations, sport activities and the free time activities are different depending on the intentions to create new woman imago in snowboarding culture or maintaining the old masculine snowboarding culture. But they both have common purposes on using Instagram to take part in the snowboarding culture by discussing with the images in a larger network of snowboarding culture and maintaining their status in the snowboarding culture. Also they both love and respect nature, dream about mountains and live from snow.

The third question about what do these photos tell about female snowboarding culture, in addition already found out in the earlier questions, the female snowboarding culture is in the state where it is starting to show more independent sub-culture form from the original main snowboarding culture. It has conflicts about the body presentation of women in public and in the female snowboarding it is also questionable should the pro-snowboarders represent their personal life in their social media channels or only concentrate in creating the professional imago. I think this is the never-ending debate inside the snowboarding culture generally. Is the snowboarding a lifestyle, and when it is, what is included in it?

Even the women studied in this research are all different from each other and they all have similarities too. They are part of this bigger picture and they have only their own roles in it. Some of them are representing more often sport, some are more focused on nature and some again in snowboarding. Photo and image culture is an important part of the snowboarding culture. It is one of the main actions alongside the snowboarding. This point in the conclusion that there should be more studies about the snowboarding images, i.e. photos as art of the snowboarders.

For the last question, is there female snowboarding culture, I will state that there is women snowboarding culture existing and it is growing. The women snowboarding culture needs these iconic pro-women to break the rules and make new ones inside the masculine snowboarding culture. These rules are concerning the matters like: taking care of oneself, bringing more soft and feminine values inside the culture by for i.e. yoga, feminine body

presentations and girly outfits. The feminine routines of perform inside the snowboarding culture will still carry the original matters, like boarding activities and dream of mountains, snow and having fun with friends. Or maybe finally the snowboarding culture has achieved the original state of it, as equal culture for women and men. This study points out that there is more to study in the women representations in snowboarding culture. This study is a small sample so the wider generalization is difficult to make and it is not the goal of this study.

Moreover this study presents how important the matter of visual is for today people. Understanding, identifying and belonging to something through the visual representations are one way to exist and take part in the networks of communication in communities, nations and globally. It also means that there must be this visual language we are all speaking and understanding. This visual language, even when leaning on the linguistic arguments (Hannula 2003, 15), is different from the spoken language we use for communicating in everyday life and where we are basing our meanings and intentions.

This study is also the first opening of personal feminist argument of mine. Basing my opinion in this study, I will perform my identity in the culture of snowboarding from now on with a try to break the rules as a woman who wears whatever she likes when snowboarding and snowboarding, as she wants without the fear of losing any credibility or respect as a snowboarder. Only changing the representation of own is possible to change the attitudes of others, even when it means to be outsider, the other.

Beside the main point of this study I've been discussing about how objective I'm, as a spectator, considering the photos seen in the social media channels. The people I'm following in social media can be friends, family, strangers or celebrities. Is it possible to view the images objectively regardless the own past, lived life, personal experiences and the personal touch to the subject? My proposition is that, the images I see are creating a need in me, a need to take part and experience the presented place, action, culture, atmosphere and lifestyle. And when we take part and experience for example place by posting our photos of this experience we are taking part in creating and maintaining the culture.

For me it feels, that by looking the images in virtually it is possible to belong into the culture of female snowboarding. But when trying to participate in the women snowboarding in areal life there is always the feel of inadequacy, not being enough of something to be counted in. Like I already brought out earlier: in the critical cultural studies there are mostly present the questions of the equality, class position, dominant mass-culture, consuming culture products,

power, capitalism and markets. And more over culture as a tool to order and classify people. (Gartman 2012, 1-11.) Is it the role of me to make the society of snowboarders “feel” whole by shutting myself out? Not by intentionally, but is this how societies and cultures work.

## *7.2 Evaluating the process and the results*

The process of this research has been altogether about four years. It started from the thought of the study of the images and visual culture of snowboarders. In the course of time it changed to concern female snowboarders and their representations. When I now think about what I thought about the subject four years ago I could not disagree more myself. This study has changed my personal world through the information and grown knowledge base. I have got more tools to act and play in the field of the cultural studies and snowboarding culture.

If I could change something in this study now, I would focus more in the feminist theory and study approaches. I believe the feminist theories would give strict context to this study and deeper approaches in the questions of female representations in generally. Also I would think about the method of interpreting the images, even I feel the critical theory has been justified in this study well. Still I would have needed more constructed method on analysing the images. However, I believe by studying images and visual culture, it is possible to find out matters of life easier and more understandable way. By looking and understanding what one has seen, it is possible to understand networks of meanings in smaller and larger contexts.

In my research I should have focused more on the choosing process of the material, the images. Now there were no strict rules for the images studied. I feel, I should have collected the images by criteria of timeline. For example I could have collected a photo from certain dates and from the period of a year or two. So there would have been same amount of photos from all the four women and the change of the themes in photos might not have been so different. Also I should have had some kind of strict method of how to categorize the photos and then present them and evaluate them together. The analysing process changed little bit depending on the category. And this happened because the photos and the number of photos were so different from each other.

One thing concerning the credibility of the result and the research is the age of the material. As the images were collected over a year before the analysis there is this gap of time. This

means, the findings might be already developed on the next state. Again this proves how our world is moving forward quite fast and there is this flood of visual material that stops existing in a short period of time. But this study can be considered as a record of female snowboarding culture in 2016. Today the focus should be on the live streams and in video formatted material. In Instagram users are posting more and more Instastories that are short videos of people's current situations.

In the end of the evaluation of this study, I'm not stating this is the final truth of female snowboarding. This study is an address for more precise research of women representations in snowboarding culture in the field of visual cultural studies.

### *7.3 Further study*

In the future I would like to study inside the feminist theories and gender studies these women representations in the snowboarding culture, maybe even expanding the subject to consider all women representations in the snowboarding and freeskiing culture. I think for this kind of study, there is a need also for some kind of research of the men representations to have something to compare in the light of gender questions. I believe there are more different women representations existing, creating more different sub-cultures inside the snowboarding culture. This would be interesting to study also from the perspective of youth amateur snowboarders or focusing only in the snowboarding crews.

Another approach could be the visual culture inside the snowboarding culture. This study would concentrate on finding the ideals of photographing snowboarding and examples of making snowboarding movies. This would be interesting from the perspective of the amateurs vs. pro-snowboarders. In my opinion, there is still more to learn from the snowboarding culture and women especially.

## REFERENCES

- Barnett, B & Copeland, D & Makemson, H & Motley, P (2011). *An Introduction to Visual Theory and Practice in the Digital Age*. Peter Lang Publishing , Inc. New York.
- Beasley, Ron & Danesi, Marcel (2002). *Persuasive Signs*. Mouyton de Cruyter. Berlin. Germany.
- Benjamin, K. 2012, *Instagram*, Haymarket Business Publications Ltd, London.
- Danesi, Marcel (1998). *Sign, Thought & Culture*. A basic course in semiotics. 2nd edition. Canadian Scholars' Press. Toronto, Ontario. Canada.
- During, Simon (1993). *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Routledge. London.
- Donath, Judith (2014). *The Social Machine - Designs for Living Online*. MIT Press. USA.
- Emmison, Michael, Smith, Philip D, Mayall, Margery (2012). *Introducing Qualitative Methods series : Researching the Visual (2)*. SAGE Publications Ltd. Cornwall.
- Evans, Jessica & Hall, Stuart (1999). *Visual culture: The reader*. Sage Publications. London.
- Fuchs, Christian (2015). *Culture and economy in the age of social media*. Routledge. New York.
- Gartman, David (2012). *Culture, Class and Critical Theory*. Between Bourdieu and the Frankfurt school. Routledge. New York.
- Hall, Stuart (1997). *Representation. Cultural representations and signifying practices*. The Open University. Bath Press Colourbooks. Glasgow, GB.
- Hannula, Mika (2003). *Everything or Nothing – Critical theory, Contemporary Art and Visual Culture*. Academy of Fine Arts 2005. Comosprint. Espoo, Finland.
- Heywood, Ian & Sandywell, Brian Gardiner, Michael & Nadarajan, Gunalan & Sousloff, Catherine (2012). *The Handbook of Visual Culture*. Berg. Printed in UK by the MPG Book groups.
- Hänninen, Riitta (2012). *Puuterilumen lumo – Tutkimus lumilautakulttuurista*. The Allure of Powder Snow – A Study on Snowboarding Culture. Jyväskylän University Printing House. Jyväskylä.



Kendall, G, & Wickham, GM (2001), *Understanding Culture : Cultural Studies, Order, Ordering*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London, GB. Available from: ProQuest ebrary. [22 November 2016].

Laukkanen, Marjo (2007). *Sähköinen seksuaalisuus. Tutkimus tyttöydestä nettikeskusteluissa*. Lapin Yliopisto.

Lövheim, Mia, Jansson, André, Paasonen, Susanna & Sumiala, Johanna (2013). Social media: implications for everyday life, politics and human agency. *Approaching Religion*, vol 3, no. 2, pp. 26-37.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas (1999). *An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Routledge. New York.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas (1998). *The Visual Culture reader*. Routledge.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas (2013). *The visual culture reader* (3rd ed.). Abingdon ; New York: Routledge.

Ojala, A.-L. & Itkonen, H (2013). Median merkitys nuorisokulttuurisessa liikkumisessa. *Nuorisotutkimus*, 31 (4), 20–35.

Ojala, Anna-Liisa (2015). *Vaihtoehtoisuutta ja valtavirtaisuutta. Tutkimus suomalaisten lumilautailijoidenuria raamittavista asenteista, olosuhteista ja resursseista*. Jyväskylä University Printing House. Jyväskylä.

Paasonen, Susanna (2002). *Women, Cyberdiscourse and the Popular Internet*. University of Turku.

Sheldon, P, Bryant, K (2016). Instagram: Motives for its use and relationship to narcissism and contextual age. *Computer in Human Behavior* 58(2016)(89-97).

Sontag, Susan (2003). *Regarding The Pain of Others*. Penguin Group. London, England.

Stallabrass, Julian (2008). *The Power and Impotence of Images*. Brighton Photo Biennial 2008.

Sturken, Marita & Cartwright, Lisa (2009). *Practises of Looking – An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Second edition. Oxford University Press. New York.

Thorpe, Holly (2007). Jibbing The Gender Order: Females in the Snowboarding Culture. In *edition Sport in Society*, 8:1, 76-100, DOI: 10.1080/1743043052000316632.

Wells, Liz (2003). *The Photography Reader*. Routledge. New York.

Woermann, N (2012). On the Slope Is on the Screen: Prosumption, Social Media Practices, and Scopic Systems in the Freeskiing Subculture. *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(4) 618–640 © 2012 SAGE Publications.

Oxford English Dictionary OED 24.4.2014 & 26.4.2014,

<http://www.oed.com/login.ezproxy.ulapland.fi>

Virtuaali AMK. 2.4.2017

<http://www2.amk.fi/digma.fi/www.amk.fi/opintojaksot/0709019/1193463890749/1193464144782/1194348641731/1194356879229.html>

Ilta-Sanomat 6.5.2017. <http://www.is.fi/lumilautailu/art-2000005046177.html>